

THE STRANGE LOVES OF BEATRICE JERVAN by Max Brand

FANTASY FICTION

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SHE SAID 'TAKE ME IF YOU CAN' by Theodore Roscoe

SPEAK TO ME OF DEATH by Cornell Woolrich

THE FLYING EYE by Robert Arthur

THE GHOST AND CAPTAIN LAWRIE by Richard Sale

a true fantasy story . . .

The Voice in the Foxhole

He cowered in darkness, cornered by disaster, until a voice heard 'round the world sparked an incredible episode at Bastogne.

by Corporal Waldo McQueen

My outfit was dug in due east of Bastogne. The Jerries had surrounded and pushed us into a circle. Somewhere south, we heard, "Blood and Guts" Patton was turning his tanks in our direction. Somewhere west, we heard, the fly boys were waiting to take off when the fog cleared. But the fog wasn't clearing and the Germans were pushing hard. My outfit had been on the move for seventy-two hours. During that time, nobody slept. Now the night was heavy around my foxhole and I was on point duty and supposed to stay awake another four hours.

Going sleepless for seventy-six hours is not for boy scouts. Not when you are running and shooting and flopping, and hoping to live just another minute. Your eyeballs become raw onions and your lids grate when you blink as if lined with emery paper. My job was to stay awake, which was the same thing as staying alive.

It wasn't easy. I tried all the old tricks. None worked as well as I wanted them to work. The weight on my eyes kept pushing them shut. I bounced my forehead on the frozen ground until it throbbed.

Finally, I started looking through my pockets. Anything that could hold my interest might keep me awake a little longer. I knew that Germans were out there in the woods. I also remembered my sergeant's tired voice: "Stay awake, Mac! If you don't, it's curtains for all of us." Besides, there was a piece in the book about a firing squad for any soldier found asleep at his post.

I took out a letter from my wife. She had sent a picture of our kid. I'd never even seen him. Tom was his name. Looking at him,

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Hello . . . and welcome!

Readers of fantasy stories, may I salute you?

You are members of a very special clan.

It was a great adventurer who said "Man wants to know what lies behind the far horizon. When I stop wanting to know, I'll stop being a man."

Readers of fantasy stories want to know what lies beyond. Writers of fantasy stories explore worlds daily which would have delighted those gallants of history, Columbus, Clive, Drake, and Amundsen.

John D. Rockefeller once said, "I want to hire men with imagination. Every boy should study to become an imagineer."

Imagineering has given us the wildest fantasy and the sanest science. Without it we would have no Headless Horseman in our literature, no Unfinished Symphony in our music. Without it we would not have autos or planes or atoms which may yet serve a peaceful world. Or sulpha or surgery or the lowly grapefruit.

A Supreme Court justice once told his young secretary, "Your own immortality comes from creating something new. If you discover a new fact or a new meaning in an old fact, you are as useful to mankind as he who discovers a continent."

In fantasy, something new is created in each situation. You who read these stories are seekers of new meanings. By your reading and searching, you join those who have the special blessing of imagination. Benjamin Franklin had it and Einstein and Winston Churchill. Your mind has burst the bindings which bound you to those things which could be seen and felt with the hands or tongue. You are among the fortunate who walk in freedom, invisible if you wish, speaking strange tongues when you please, and visiting among the planets on holiday weekends. Your chariot may be the belly of an ant or a sun-

powered spaceship. No engineer has blue-printed your vehicle, no travel bureau has planned your itinerary, yet who is to say such things are improbable?

As a meeting place for such special adventurers, FANTASY FICTION MAGAZINE will endeavor to reward your interest. It will seek out the best of the written and to-be-written literature of fantasy. It will seek to entertain you lavishly; but most of all, it will try to give wings to your mind, bringing into your personal life a sharpening of all your talents of imagination—without which we mortals are but clods.

One such adventurer is Theodore Roscoe, the writer whose story begins below. He combines a thrilling approach with a twist that is out of this world. Since Poe, no one is his superior. I invite you to pull up a chair and join this valiant brigade.

Curtis Mitchell,
Editor and Publisher

She Said "Take Me ... If You Dare"

By Theodore Roscoe

The ship, Cairo-bound, was steaming out of the Red Sea into the Gulf of Suez, and a sunset with more glory than all the battle flags of the world had transmuted an eastern shoreline to a coast of solid gold.

Farraday, the foremost collector in the business, had been moody, almost nervous, throughout the afternoon. Ordinarily occupied with his specimen cages on the foredeck, he had paced in offish solitude

behind the steering-engine house, gravity in his weathered, angular face, eyes brooding on the passing shore. At dinner, when the naturalist started his first spoonful of consomme, then flung the napkin to lips, pushed back from the table and stalked from the saloon as if ill, his traveling companion, Mendel the metallurgist, was worried.

"What was the matter?" he wanted to know, coming abreast with the naturalist, who was hurrying aft. "You looked, when you started your soup, as if you'd been poisoned."

"I have." Farraday touched his forehead with a handkerchief. "That chef must have gone insane. That stuff tasted deadly."

Mendel suggested summoning the captain, but the naturalist shook his head.

"Not that way," he demurred. "That isn't what I mean."

When they stood by the jackstaff where the frigate birds wheeled, the metallurgist voiced some exasperation.

"Look here, Farraday, what's been eating you? All afternoon you've gloomed around by yourself, watching that Sinai coastline as cryptic as an Egyptian cat, and now a spoonful of soup sets you off as if a ghost had seen you. If there's anything I can do—"

"You started it," the naturalist said somberly. "Remember when our ship came in sight of Sinai? I said we must be passing over the spot where Moses led the Children of Israel across the Red Sea. The place where the waves rolled back to let the Chosen People cross dry-shod and escape the armies of Pharaoh. You said you didn't believe in those Bible stories."

"I said I didn't believe in miracles," the metallurgist snapped. "Moses might have led his crowd across the Red Sea at some shallow spot that has since been dredged out by the Suez Canal engineers. Perhaps some conjunction of wind and tide drove the waters back. But there wasn't any so-called miracle. And I expressed surprise at you, a scientist, talking as if you believed there was. And what's this to do with a dish of soup?"

Farraday's eyes were focused on the tenuous gold thread that was land in the east; his voice came curiously solemn from his lean and hardened jaws. "Coincidence, that's all. You disputing the miracles, then that soup. Miracles? There's the land they came from, that Near East littoral out there. As for Moses and his Children—I knew one of those Israelites. A woman with all the mystery of midnight and the wonder of day, a face and figure of pure magic, an allure and

bafflement that could turn men into fanatics and set two friends clawing at each other like murderers."

The naturalist scrubbed his lips with his handkerchief as if to scour them of the memory; and the metallurgist, who had known him as a confirmed bachelor, regarded Farraday in mounting astonishment.

"Go inland," the naturalist pointed, "through those hills beyond Sinai and you'll come to the Gulf of Akaba. Arabia lies across the Gulf, and just north of the Arabian border you'll come to a place I don't like to think about. That's where I met this woman. I didn't believe in miracles myself in those days. Neither did a friend of mine who was with me when I met her. She had the sort of face that wouldn't believe in miracles, either. Bold. Hard. Wait till I tell you how hard. My friend pronounced her a woman who would take a dare, just the precious type of woman he wanted. He wanted her and I wanted her, and we almost murdered each other in cold blood to get her. Only a miracle saved us. Do you want to know what kind of poison was in my soup, tonight? Do you want to hear about this wonderful woman and the miracle that happened?"

Fixed on that flaming eastern shore-line, Farraday's eyes were dark with a light not reflected from the Red Sea sundown.

The metallurgist said he wanted to know.

The metallurgist was hungry when his friend began the story, but when it was finished he had lost his appetite.

Two years after the War (Farraday began) the natural history society I was working with decided to send me into the Arabian desert after specimens—a rare type of basilisk lizard, to be exact—and I was to go in from the Gulf of Akaba, work across the north end of Arabia and swing back south to the coast of the Red Sea. Egypt, Palestine and Arabia all meet at the Gulf up there, but they don't shake hands.

It's a foul place at best, and two years after the World War wasn't best. Allenby's army had been around there, so had Lawrence. You'll recall the British made a lot of promises to the Arabs that London didn't keep, and some of the tribes didn't care if the war was over or not. If I wanted to get out of there with lizard skins—not to mention my own—I'd have to walk on eggs. My employers instructed me to sing low when I met any Arabs; then they sent me Rallston as my assistant collector!

It was a ticklish enough assignment without the extra hazard of

this Johnny Rallston. A naturalist runs across some pretty wild specimens in his work, but Rallston was just about the wildest young mammal I'd been associated with. Indigenous to Australia, he hailed from Brisbane, and when I say "hail" I mean he came shouting, jaw out, fists cocked, ready to go.

His father was a revivalist clergyman of the old hell's fire and damnation school, and the boy had been reared in a parsonage on prunes and proverbs—and a horsewhip, too, I fancy—by the sort of maiden aunts who still wore bustles on the back of their minds. Then the War had let him out of his cage and he'd started off to see the world with Allenby. He'd been everything from air pilot to cameleer, and after the Armistice he'd bummed around the Near East on all manner of crazy jobs, finally landing a position with my outfit.

I'll never forget my first view of Rallston. He'd been with the Society about a month, and he came slamming into our Cairo office as if he owned the affair. He wore a British officer's cap, insignia removed, set challengingly forward on a thatch of bleached hair; a cowboy's grin in a face as ruddy as a cherub's; impudence in green-blue eyes; a pair of whipcord riding breeches that had lost their whip and most of the cord. Over his shoulder he carried an expensive photographer's kit—"borrowed" from the department of signals—and his feet were bare.

"Sold the field boots," he told me with a grin. "Thomas of London and worth most a ticket anywhere. Sold 'em to buy this naval officer's wife a bit of jade. All I wanted was one dance because she was beautiful. She took the jade; then she wouldn't dance with me 'cause I'm barefoot."

"Sold your boots to buy a trinket?" I gaped at Rallston. "I thought you were working to save money and go back to Australia."

"Go home?" he laughed. "Not me! Not back to that parsonage. You never knew my old man. Believes every word of the Bible, that sort of thing. Say, he almost had me studying for the ministry."

"And why didn't you?"

"I couldn't believe," he told me, "in miracles."

We came to be fast friends the following months in Cairo, and I thought I knew Rallston pretty well. I was fifteen years younger, myself, in those days, and we got in some wild scrapes together around the town. I didn't know what was the matter with him, but I thought I could guess. Typical minister's son breaking loose from too much early repression. Out to paint the town red. His hatred of that home parsonage and all it represented amounted to a phobia. He read

all the sophisticated agnostic literature he could lay his hands on, and called himself an atheist.

"I've chucked all that religion stuff," he liked to say. "Old-fashioned bunk, that's all it is. I've got a new ideal."

Apparently this new ideal had nothing to do with keeping solvent or sober, but he did his work well enough and the Society kept him on. He had a likely fist, and he knew the Arab lingo. That's why they sent him on the Arabian lizard-hunting expedition to be my assistant.

Now you may think yourself acquainted with a chap around the city, but you never know a man until you're off with him in some isolated spot like that jumping-off Gulf of Akaba place, north end of the Red Sea. That's where I first came to know the real matter with my Australian assistant collector. That's where I learned about his "new ideal." Rallston was a collector, all right, but not of lizards. I collected lizards. Rallston collected women!

Women, women, women! That boy had gone girl-crazy. Let a British pleasure yacht come steaming up the coast and there was Rallston swimming out to the ship—quite literally—with a rose in his teeth. Let a caravan come grunting and snuffling over the sand dunes, and Rallston was down in the oasis to meet it, like as not fighting three beachcombers for the hand of some desert belle before the camels had time to kneel. I thought when we got clear of the seaport that marked our base of supplies, and started into the desert, he'd get over it, but the desert was worse.

Do you know why he lugged that photographer's outfit with him? To take pictures of beautiful women, that was why. To photograph the lovely ladies he always thought he was meeting. His tunic pockets were stuffed with snapshots. Egyptian dancing girls in seven veils. Moslem debutantes with one eye wistful behind bars. Circassian "princesses" in fantastic costumes from heaven knew where.

Officers' wives. Russian refugees. All the back wash the War had left stranded on the Near East beach and rarer specimens from the direction of Mecca. Daytimes I'd be off bottling basilisks. Rallston would be camera-hunting ladies off in oasis palms. Nights he'd lie sprawled on the sand, sorting through his precious photographs and sighing like a crack-brained Romeo.

Like a lot of sophisticated young men who went through the war and came out thinking they were tough, this Australian hellion was as sloppily romantic inside as a bouquet of sweet peas. Having coughed up an overdose of religion, he had proceeded to swallow in

its stead—on an empty stomach—such a mess of romanticism as would have sickened St. Valentine.

"Tagging around after every skirt you see," I gibed him one night. "You're too smart to believe the Old Testament, but fall for every female who gives you the eye. Keep up this game, and you'll go home sooner than you think. In a box."

For the first time Rallston's eyes were sober. "I won't go home in a box or any way. Not till I've found that ideal."

"And what's this wonderful ideal?" I had to jeer.

"None of 'em have come up to it so far," he admitted seriously, "but I'm going to find a woman, my lad, that's something a bit different from the Alice-sit-by-the-fires you've got back in civilization. No more clinging vines for me. I don't want citified swank and lip-stick, either. I want a woman with spirit, a woman"—he swept his arm in a Shakesperean gesture—"who isn't all tied up with corsets and rules of conduct, and religion. She's got to be gorgeous looking and all, but she's got to be something more. That's why I like the girls in this country around here. No knitting and rocking chairs and chaperoned tea-parties. They have to fight their way to get around. They won't take no for an answer. That's what I want, old man. The sort of woman the only thing she *will* take is dare. Righto! A woman who could give or take a dare."

So that was the ideal my assistant collector had substituted for his old-time religion. That was the reason for his battling from one bar-room to the next and his midnight excursions where angels feared to tread. I saw what he meant, all right. Clumsily phrased, but the mental picture he conveyed was a back-to-nature dream girl riding a white horse across windswept horizons, beautiful as Godiva, spritely as Eve and bold as Ninon de Lenclos with a whip.

And of course he was looking through just the region where you'd never find such a girl. Windswept, starry-eyed and nature-free as an Arab's daughter may look as she rides across the dunes, your desert maiden is the most hide-bound and rule-booked of all the breed. Allah to her is a great big thundercloud waiting to pounce. Life is one long inhibition and next to that she's scared of her henna-whiskered menfolk. And the next biggest sin in a Moslem maiden's category is to let some white unbeliever snap her photograph.

I told you there was trouble enough to begin with, and now you've got the set-up on my assistant collector, Rallston. I scarcely have to tell you how the storm broke. Lord knows, I'd warned him. But advising your fellow man about women—especially if you've knocked

around together and happen to be nearly of an age—is something you can't do. I was fool enough, myself, on that score, and nobody to preach. You'll see I didn't hold any monopoly on the brains.

I was bottling basilisks in my tent on the sands one evening when Rallston came wallowing over the horizon as if the devil were after him. Dust trailed like the smoke from an express train behind his racing camel, and not one devil, but twenty were after him. Twenty Arab horsemen bunched together, cloaks bannered, yells yapping from their beards and bullets snapping from their guns.

"Run!" Rallston shouted at me. "Run! They'll kill you!"

I had just about time to saddle my *mehari*, and that was all. Water casks, rifles, rations, baggage, collector's equipment, everything had to be left behind. It was touch and go with those desert nomads shooting the callouses off my camel's heels; our only chance lay in out-distancing those ponies to the Red Sea coast and we were a good many miles up the north end of Arabia from the Red Sea.

Darkness swept down out of Asia and the desert was blotted by India ink. There wasn't a star in that blackness, or a moon. I think there was an upper layer of sand blowing overhead, and the firmament was blanked out. A wonderful situation when your compass was miles behind.

By midnight we were lost, and by sunrise we might have gone over the edge Columbus' sailors were afraid of, deep in a wilderness of canyons and barren mountain ranges ablaze in the sun like hills of scrap iron. The Red Sea was nowhere in sight, but our pursuers were. They kept right on chasing us, deeper and deeper into those burning hills of rock, and they never gave up until late afternoon.

Rallston and I pulled our doddering camels into the shadow of a big yellow boulder, and watched our enemy go. They fired a few discharges into the air as a final warning, turned their horses and rode back over a ridge, vanishing in the dust-haze toward Arabia. Rallston lounged against the rock and watched the departure with a rueful grin.

"By Jove, that was a shave! Imagine them going off the deep end like that, just because I was taking this Arab girl's picture!" He patted the camera-box slung at his side, and the corners of his mouth went down. "She wasn't worth it, though. Just like all the rest. Didn't care when I held her hand, but screamed when I snapped the camera. That brought her old man and all those devils down on me like a pack of mad dogs—"

I wanted to come down on him like a pack of mad dogs, myself. All night and all morning of that crazy race I'd been too mad to speak. Now when I blew up, my tongue was so swollen with thirst I could only stand croaking and waving a fist at the sky.

"You've done it this time, you crack-brained fool! You realize we're lost? Lost! My Mauser rifles, my binoculars, maps, five hundred dollars worth of collector's equipment, eight weeks work picking up specimens—"

"Honest, buddy, when I get the money I'll pay you back."

"Eight weeks work, specimens, probably my job, everything—" I shook my fist at the horizon where the Arabs had vanished—"everything lost back there in those sand dunes, just because you wouldn't keep your girl-crazy hands off the first female who smiled at—"

"She wasn't smiling," he corrected me. "She was crying. Standing in that oasis with her hands over her face. I thought she was swell when I first saw her. She was wearing these little ankle bells—"

"Ankle bells!" I panted. "I don't care if she was wearing the bells of Saint Mary's. Get it through your head that we've run off the map and we haven't any water! Not a drop! Only a miracle got us out of that." I raged; then I flung an arm at the landscape around us. "It'll take another miracle to get us out of this!"

"Bah!" Rallston snapped. "You know I don't believe in such rot. I'd hate to depend on Bible magic to get out of anything. I got you into this, and I'll get you out of it."

He was a cool one, all right, and scanning the gray cliffs around us, I would not have expected divine intervention, myself. There are some places on the globe where faith can waver, and that was one of them. Now that I had a chance to look at where we were, I wasn't sure we were on the globe. You've seen pictures of Death Valley. Well, this was Death Valley doubled. Even the air was dead. Heat pressed down through a silence as quiet as deafness, and the rocks lay around on shelves of pumice and limestone like white bones.

There wasn't a breath of air or a jackal as far as the eye could see. Great fissures had cracked the floor of the valley we were in, and the canyon walls sheared up as silent and bare as deserted skyscrapers. Ashes. That's what the landscape made me think of. Dead ashes. Westward where the sun was lowering, as if in a hurry to withdraw its blood-stained eye from this scene of desolation, a range of cliffs stood up jagged as the roofline of a shelled town. I tell you, there wasn't a single sign of life.

I'd never seen a place like that on the Arabian map. Maybe we'd

ended up among the craters on the other side of the moon. It was a hell of a country. I could smell the sulphur.

"All because of this damned dream girl of yours," I sneered at Rallston. "Well, what are you going to do about it? The camels had a good feed yesterday afternoon and they can keep going. But we'll be dead and cured as figs by tomorrow afternoon if we don't find water."

He pointed west up the valley.

"The Red Sea ought to be over there. I'll ride that way, and you take it east. We'll meet back at this big rock at sunset. Okay?"

I told him I wouldn't die of grief if I never saw him again, and we set out in opposite directions looking for water. But the moment Rallston's feather-brained head was out of sight I was sorry. There was something about the burning silence of that gray landscape that got up under my skin the minute he was gone.

I started leading my camel, and my boots sent echoes up the canyon, echoes that died of loneliness away up the cliffs against the sky. A kicked pebble would go rattling across the rocks with the disturbance of a rat in a tomb, and when I sat down on a boulder to rest, the silence flowed up around me in a pressure that hurt my ears.

A couple of miles by myself in that solidified, ten-million-ton hush, and I was suffering for companionship as avidly as drink. Water was nowhere to be seen. Just calcined cliffs and emptiness. I might have been the first man along that fissured valley since the time of Exodus, and I felt pretty tiny among those skyscraper walls of stone.

The queerest sensation stole over me, something quite apart from the nervousness of fatigue or fright. A feeling of evil cloaking this burned-out landscape. A sort of repugnance mixed with fear, if you can imagine the feeling. The sort of shudder you might experience on passing a leper island far at sea, or standing before an empty house with the blinds drawn on an evil street. There was something about that scorching emptiness of stone that was bad.

The oddest panic came over me. I wanted to run. I wanted to make a lot of noise and get out of there. I could see why those outraged desert tribesmen hadn't followed us in these hills. I could have throttled Rallston for losing me in this landscape, but I give you my word, when sunset started slanting orchid shadows across the rocks, I mounted and rode back to our rendezvous as if the legions of Eblis were on my track.

Just as I reached the big yellow boulder, there was Rallston riding out of the west the same way. A second his camel was silhouetted against that ragged ridge with red sky between its legs; then he came

on the gallop, riding the hump like a jockey, hair wild, camera flying on its strap, larruping along the valley bottom as if to outstrip the long gray shadows that were reaching like giant fingers after him.

I was mighty glad to see him coming, that's the truth. But when I saw his face my heart contracted with fresh alarm. Plastered with white dust from boot to crown, he looked like a wild-eyed ghost scared to grinning, until he came close enough for me to see his eyes, bloodshot not with fear but excitement. Before I could muster a yell, he was off his camel with a rodeo rider's leap, bounding at me through the dust-whirl.

"I've got her!" he screamed at me. "By God, Farraday, I've got her!"

"Water!" I cried.

"The woman, you fool!" Rallston laughed and capered around me like a crazy man, holding up his precious photographer's kit. "The woman I've been looking for. Beautiful! Marvelous! Best looking woman you ever saw, and she's got more nerve in her little finger than you ever heard of. A pack of Arabs are holding her captive in a village the other side of those cliffs," he screeched at me, "and we're going back to rescue her tonight!"

Word of honor, I could have killed him there and then. Shot him down in cold blood. That crack-potted, romance-crazy Romeo! Send him after water in this thirst-smothered wilderness and have him come back blabbing out a love story. I don't know what did stop me from killing him, except that you just can't kill fellows of Rallston's kidney. He had that hell-for-leather, sword-and-cloak, cow-jump-over-the-moon quality which charmed the lives of Casanova and Cellini and all those scapegrace matinee idols who balcony-climbed their way through history and got away with it.

Those velvet-panted rapsallions were salesmen, that's why. They talked their way into it and turned around and talked their way out of it. But they were tongue-tied bumpkins compared to my assistant collector Rallston selling me his latest heart-throb in that gray valley of petrified desolation, that night.

"Rallston," I snarled at him, "I'm going to knock your damned lovesick block off for this. Instead of asking for water in that village you were playing post office with some dame. Before I go over there to get a drink I'm going to break your head."

"Like hell," he countered, waving his arms. "You're going to help me save this woman, see? She's white, Farraday. A white woman!"

He knew the "white woman" angle would break down my sales

resistance, and once he got his teeth in that opening, he didn't let go. He outshouted me, and I began to listen. It was all pretty queer against that Valley of Death background with Rallston's voice petering out in microscopic echoes up the cliffs. If I'd had any sense I'd have whacked that Australian on the jaw right at the start, but I've said I didn't hold any monopoly on the brains, and you'll see.

When I'd left him that afternoon, Rallston had scouted over that western rim of cliffs sniffing for water, and no sooner topped the rise than he'd found it. Unfortunately it wasn't drinking water, though. As far as Rallston could tell, the water beyond those cliffs was the Red Sea.

"A devilish barren coast," he told me, "with a smell in the air. Alkaline. There's a yellow fog coming in from the western horizon, and all I could see was a couple of small boats way out. A shoulder of mountain stretched seaward under the cliffs; from where I was I couldn't see the other side of that headland, but it sure is a desolate spot. I hiked my camel down to the shore thinking I'd start around the headland, hoping to find a town."

Rallston's hopes were raised by finding a bumboat in a sort of rocky lagoon, a good-sized sailing barge about the build of a big launch with a forward hold for stowing freight.

"There's still oars in the row-locks and a deckboom with block and tackle unlimbered, like someone's put in to pick up cargo. But when I get near enough, I see that hull's been there a long time. Beached a couple of years. Sail gone to rag. The forward hold's empty, and so's a water cask under the rowing thwart. That dry keg and a skull lying up the beach told me what happened. Somebody's come ashore and started afoot around land's end. Died of thirst and never been found. It's got my wind up a bit, that skull."

It got my own wind up, hearing Rallston tell about it.

"What's this deserted native bumboat and a skull got to do with your dream girl?" I wanted to know. Rallston was reciting this detail with all the wordage of a newspaper broadcast, and I yearned to hear the end of it and wring his neck.

"I'm coming to that," he panted. "I'm coming to that. I'm telling about the boat because we're going to use it for the rescue. I'm sure that Arab village doesn't know it's there. Well, I started my camel around this headland, taking the same path that skull had been following. About two miles up over the headland, there's the town on the other side."

He halted to draw maps in the dust with his boot-toe.

"The beach spreads out under cliffs too steep for an eagle, see? There's a batch of native boats along the beach, and the town's hugged against the base of the cliffs like a bunch of white blocks piled there by high tide. It's a Moslem stronghold, judging by the minarets, a hell of a tough-looking town."

Having reason to fear the Arab temper, my assistant hadn't started down hot-foot to beg for water, but had tethered his camel and climbed down through the rocks to spy. At first he thought the village deserted; then he saw the whole population, like a crowd of sheeted ghosts, massed on the beach under the headland. Right under the rock where he was crouching.

"And that's where I saw *her*!" Rallston shook me by the arms. "She was standing in the middle of that ragged, stinking swarm, the dust standing up around her like smoke. The whole crowd was hooting, yelling, hollering around her in some kind of dance, and dragging her—*dragging* her, you hear me? She was chained, Farraday! Chained by the ankles to a flat platform of planks that was hitched to a camel. That gang of Arab wolves was dragging her down the beach. You think she was crying out, fainting? She was not! She was standing upright like a soldier, Farraday. A white mantle pulled tight around her and the sort of figure—say, when I think of those brown heathens screaming at her, it makes me sick!"

In the sooty gloaming that had filled the valley about us, Rallston's eyes were glittering like a cat's. He made me see that woman and the brown mob pulling her down the beach. He walked up and down, clenching and unclenching his fists as his voice painted the picture. He dug his father's best sermon-tones out of his memory to preach me the story of that woman's figure and how the Arabs dragged her and mobbed around her.

"And she's white," Rallston shook me. "Young. Beautiful. Stood there, ankles chained to that platform, and never made a sound nor shivered a finger. Even when she saw me up there in the rocks she never made a sound. Get this! She saw me there. Looked straight at me. Her head was turned on her shoulder all the time, disdainful, and when the drag went under the rock-shelf where I was, she looked right into my face. Did she scream for help? Not her! Any other woman would have screamed and given me away. This girl stood steady as Gibraltar. Didn't move a muscle. I couldn't see her eyes for the shadow, but her face was proud as a queen's, not a sign of fear. From her head to her little bare feet she was simply covered with that stinging white dust, but her chin was up, I tell you. Her

mouth. Defiant. Damn near contemptuous. Of the mob and—and me, too. 'Come and get me,' she looked at me with that expression. By God! like a challenge. 'Come and get me if you're big enough. I don't think you can do it, but come and get me if you think you're big enough. I dare you!'

Rallston's lips went white at this part of the story, and the sweat beads glittered like mercury on his knotted forehead. I could feel my own pulse getting up speed. Talk about Latins—it takes the Anglo-Saxon to play the heroics. Already I'd forgotten my lips were splitting from thirst.

"What happened then?" I whispered. "What did they do with her then?"

"Then the whole rotten hubbub went off down the beach," Rallston cursed, "and she just kept looking back over her shoulder, chin raised, looking up at me with that expression. I couldn't help her. All I could do was lie low and watch. Watch that mob of brutes drag her to a hole in the rocks down the headland, a little cave. They left her there. Posted a dirty beggar with a big iron spear on guard, and streamed back to their filthy village. She was looking back at the last. My God, for all I know they're going to kill her. You've got to help me save her, Farraday! I'm going back and get her out of there tonight if it's the last thing I live to do!"

I said harshly:

"It'll be the last thing you'll live to do, all right. Listen, you fool. How can two of us attack an Arab village tonight or any night? Croaking for water, unarmed—"

"We'll surprise them," he blazed at me. "That cave isn't far from the water and the town's about a mile up the beach, away from the headland. We'll row around the headland in the dark, take her on the rush!"

"Take her where?" I swore. I was weakening, and it made me mad. Where could you take a woman in that desert of stones? Even the atmosphere was petrified.

Rallston swung an impatient arm.

"Take her to sea, man! To sea! There's a fog out there. We wouldn't have a chance going inland, but they'll never see us in that fog. All we've got to do is make the ship lane to Suez and we'll be picked up by midnight. Look!"

Now how do you suppose that lad ended his sale's talk? He was a devil of a boy, all right. He began to tear into his photographer's kit; dumped out his camera, rolls of film, little bottles of chemical, all the

truck these vagabond photographers around fairs and boardwalks have to carry. Next thing I knew, he'd fished from an envelope, a damp, glazed picture. A photograph, on my word!

"I got her," he panted through his teeth, "just as the mob was dragging her away. Snapped the camera just at the second. Too much dust and no time to focus; then I had to stop and develop the thing in twilight up in those cliffs and only a little water from my bottle in my kit."

A little water in his kit and he'd used it for photography! But I never thought about it then. I was staring at that photograph and that photograph was staring at me. There wasn't much light left to see it by, but there was enough. Enough to see the white figure of a woman standing on a wooden drag in the midst of a hooded, dark-whiskered mob; her mantle pulled tight about her, her back to the camera, face turned on her shoulder, chin lifted above the coiling dust.

Some women can hug a woolen wrap around them and make it sheer as a veil. Only it wasn't the figure that bothered me. It was the expression on the woman's face. Rallston hadn't missed it when he called it, "Come and get me. I dare you!" But he hadn't gone far enough. All the defiance and scorn of a woman for the terrors of a man's world were in that expression.

Maybe she was in trouble, but she'd ask nobody's advice. There was independence in that chin, neither fear nor humility. It was a beautiful face, wilfully beautiful—the face of a lost *Peri* who defied the devils and taunted the angels to the rescue. The challenge and beauty of that face struck up out of the photograph, dim as it was, and made my senses swim.

"Maybe they're going to kill her," Rallston hoarsed out. "Or they're holding her for ransom! Are you going to leave her chained in that cave for the hands of those brutes?"

"Rallston," I cried, "what are we waiting for?"

Did you think there was a woman so wonderfully bold and beautiful, just the sight of her photograph would bring you running? Well, you don't know the half of how wonderful that woman was! Rallston jumped his camel and I grabbed mine and followed him up the valley and over the western cliffs with no more thought of the danger than the proverbial fool in a place forbidden to the angels. And there weren't any angels around the coast where Rallston led me that night. There was none of the windy distance, no healthy oceanic sweep to that seascape.

A moon that looked moldy was sneaking down a low-hung sky as

our camels topped the crags, and I got my first view of the sea. The beach far below was a ragged thread of lime. Rocks were mounded like slag along the shore, waste deposit left there from some long-ago reducing process, some overwhelming fire that had killed even the stones. The smell of that ancient fire was still in the night, sulphurous.

The water that had come too late had lain there too many centuries, yellowed, stagnated. Not far from the shoreline a saffron fog that might have been the smoke of that ancient, now-forgotten holocaust was banked up under the sky to blot the horizons.

Can you imagine a sea gone stale? Sweeping in with long undulant strides that came from no impulse in the earth but might have been started by the moon, the swells washed the coast with a sullen mutter that only understoned the silence.

If I didn't like the hinterland we'd come from, I liked the coast even less. It couldn't be the Red Sea. The scrap iron cliffs, the clinker-like shore, the sea under the moon made me think of water in the firebox of a cast-off iron stove.

"Turn the camels loose here," Rallston ordered in a voice trembling with excitement. "There's the boat I told you about. Hurry."

That boat with its empty thwarts, its dried watercask, its sailcloth with the moon shining through, oars abandoned and that silent skull for a watcher up the beach, did nothing to cheer the scene. Surf creamed against the hull, booming a leaden echo through the square hatchway in the foredeck, the sound coming up from an empty cargo hold. Not unlike a small canal barge, the craft looked about as seaworthy as that Norsemen's gondola they found on the coast of Labrador.

But I couldn't back out now. My companion dredged a rusty anchor out of the shallows, and side by side on the thwart, each with an oar, we pulled our brains out to get her around the headland. Like a thieving galleon we sneaked around land's end, and I was sweating like a teakettle when Rallston steered us into a hideaway between tall rocks and told me we'd reached the spot.

Spot was right. The beach there curved like a gigantic scimitar flat under the moon, and when I saw the white-walled village at the far end of its tip, I held my breath.

"There's the town," Rallston whispered. He was leading me through a goat-jump trail up the rocks, stooped over, tense, stealthy as an Indian. "And"—he stopped to fasten sinewy fingers around a loose rock—"there's the cave and the guard. Now!"

As Rallston gritted, "Now!" he sprang from the shadows like a panther. I had a momentary glimpse of a dark aperture scooped out under the cliff's overhang and a figure posed on the threshold, a ragged figure leaning on a spear. *Slug!* The man's turban muffled the blow. Rallston's rock dropped like a meteor and the Arab fell. My assistant collected the heavy iron spear, beckoned, darted into the cave. I jumped in after him, stiffened as my boots hit over the threshold, stopped. Mr. Rallston had already stopped. Together we stood. And stared.

She was waiting in the inner darkness of that close-walled den, barefoot on her platform, her toes pointed toward the back wall, her head turned on her shoulder, face toward the door. Moonbeams poured yellow-green through the arch in the rocks and touched her curved, tense figure with gelid radiance, cold as witch-shine.

She was tall as a man, and from heels to crown in the dimness she sent off a white glow, ghostly as one summoned from the astral plane. Beneath the stiff folds of her tight-drawn shawl, her eyes stared in colorless, fixed immobility, stared at us in a way that put creeps through my hair.

Not a feature in that white face stirred. Not a muscle under the white-dusted cloak. Face posed in that over-the-shoulder "come get me if you think you're big enough" expression, she stood. Not a mouse of sound from her, and motionless as rock.

It was Rallston who fractured the silence, and when that rascally Australian opened his lips the whisper came out of them like a rush of air from a broken tire valve.

"Good God! Farraday! It's a *statue!*"

Well, I saw what had happened. That woman-daffy Australian's mind had been so stuffed with visions of his dream girl that, coming suddenly on a statue which met his romantic requirements, he'd failed to distinguish it from flesh and blood. There was always this wonder woman's picture in the cornea of his eye, and dust and a few shadows had tricked him. I started to give him a tongue-lashing. I was going to call him every name in the directory for bringing me across limbo to rescue an image. Then I stopped.

"I didn't know," Rallston was groaning. "I swear to God she looked real as life—"

Looked real as life? That statue *was* real as life! Rallston wasn't the only one who'd been tricked. The eye of his British military

camera had been tricked, too. Anything that could deceive a lens made for penetrating camouflage had to be pretty lifelike, and I found myself staring at the sculptured woman's face in deepening astonishment.

Eye to eye with the thing, I couldn't drag my glance away. That sculpture had life to its very eyelids. Detail, chin, cheek, lips, a curl of hair on the forehead, texture of the shawl, the tight folds of the mantle outlining a lissom thigh, every detail had been carved to perfection.

How many statues have you know that could convey an expression? I'd been around the Louvre and I'd seen the Greeks. You'll suggest Praxiteles, and he was a master sculptor, but he never did anything as good as that woman in the cave. The figures in the Louvre were lumps of clay by comparison. This statue fairly breathed. Another moment and the lips would speak, demand us to take the chains off her ankles, be arrogant about it, too.

I couldn't tell whether she was marble or granite from the coating of dust, but whatever rock she was hewn from was vital in contrast to the burned-out slag of that wilderness. The thing came over me like a wave as I stared. Can you see the thoughts through my head? The first shock of astonishment followed by the second of awe?

I had to put out a finger, touch that stone to make sure. If genius shows in slavery to detail, if art means creating a verisimilitude to life, that statue had it. A master artist had done that piece of work. The greatest sculptor in the universe! It was a wonderful statue!

"It's wonderful!" I gasped at Rallston. "Wonderful!"

His voice was low, throaty. "The woman I've been looking for all my life—a statue!"

"Don't be a fool," I whispered at him. "This is worth a thousand flesh-and-blood women! Why, it's the greatest bit of carving in the world. To think these Arabs have kept it hidden in a cave. It must be over hundreds of years old, brought here by Arab pirates. But it isn't Athenian. That artist was long before Athens. Have you any idea what a thing like this is worth?"

I saw Rallston's lips had wried back in a grin. He was nodding, breathing hard.

"Come on, then. Let's get her out of here."

Looking back on that part of this story, I sometimes wonder if that atheistic minister's son hadn't put one over on me, after all. I sometimes wonder if he hadn't known it was a statue all along, hadn't pre-

tended his bafflement and surprise. Guessing I'd never help him abduct any piece of statuary at the risk of my neck, he'd cooked up the woman angle, brought the snapshot to convince me because he needed my help in lifting the thing.

Well, he didn't have to convince me when I saw it, whether or no. I wanted that statue as I never wanted anything before, and so did Rallston. Any fool could have seen the genius in the thing. As to the lifting, both figuratively and actually, it was a job for two men.

Rallston attacked the chains fastening it to its platform, prying at the links with the spear, while I wrapped my arms around the statue and strove to shift its weight. Sweat broke on my forehead. The thing was heavier than three tombstones; must have weighed half a ton.

"Hold on," I puffed at Rallston. "We couldn't carry her out of here if there were six of us. We'll pull it on the drag!"

I sped a glance out of the cavern and up the beach to the walls of the moonlit town, expecting any second hell would pop. I didn't need any little bird to tell me what would happen if those Moslems discovered us pilfering their treasure. They knew the value of this statue, or they wouldn't have kept it hidden in a cave.

Then it occurred to me they might worship this wonder. Islam forbade idolatry, but there were tribes in Arabia who dated their customs to the days of Solomon and Sheva—if this image were a fetish and Rallston had spied it during some religious festival, there'd be triple hell if we were caught.

"Snap into it," Rallston goaded me breathlessly. "We've got to get out of here before that guard wakes up. Shove! Give her a shove!"

To this day I don't know how we ever budged that woman. The drag had no runners and we might have set out to move Mohammed's mountain. Teeth set, veins jutting, we put shoulders together and hands on the platform's end, braced our feet on the cave wall and pushed like the twins of Hercules. On the stone floor Rallston's boots skidded and thrashed like the drivewheels of a freight engine trying to start on wet tracks.

We panted, puffed, swallowed oaths. Then for no reason at all the thing came unglued from its lethargy; platform and statue went slithering out into the moonlight past the upturned toes of the unconscious sentry. The platform gave a little scream as it scraped out over the stones, and for half an instant I thought the woman had come to life and voiced a cry.

My word, I did. I shook with anxiety, fearing the town would hear that screech, but the distant white walls went on sleeping, like the recumbent guard.

Rallston gave the guard a second crack on the head for good luck, and we started our wonder woman down the beach. Out in the moonlight, the statue was more wonderful than ever. There was something about that expression in stone that almost scared me. The curled stone lips, the sneer of the nostrils, the expression was more than a taunt. It seemed to jeer and invite at the same time—you've had women look over their shoulder at you like that?—and meanwhile the beauty of form rushed the blood to my head.

Rallston's voice came savage through set teeth.

"Push, you idiot! Get her to the boat!"

If ever there was a madder kidnapping in history, I'd like to know it. It was easier sledding on the crusted sand. The beach sloped toward the water, and we skidded the drag at half a mile an hour, raising columns of white dust that stood up against the moon. The white dust was thick as gunpowder, acrid, bitter in the nostrils; twice I had to sneeze. I labored like a piano mover, darting nervous eyes at the sleeping town.

But a man will risk plenty when he's looking at a million dollars, and the statue was worth two million, or I was blind. When I thought of what the archeologists and art collectors would pay for the sculpture, desire gripped me like a drug. Rallston looked drugged, too. His gray-green eyes were shining as if coated with enamel. We were a pair, all right. A pair of deuces playing in a game with a joker.

Well, we got her down to the bumboat, and we got her aboard. We worked like pyramid builders to do it, I can promise you. Rotted tackle snapped like thread, had to be knotted in a dozen places. That decayed deck boom bent like a sapling bough as we hauled and tore our fingernails, elevating the cargo inboard and lowering her down the hatch.

Get a picture of us loading that statue on that wilderness shore. Rallston broke her ankle chains with the spear, and we hoisted her up and let her down. I groaned in fear of breaking the brittle statuary. Lowering her into the bumboat's hold we splintered a chip from her shoulder, and it brought the tears to my eyes.

Down in the dusty gloom of the barge-hold—a box of a place about big enough for fifty sacks of meal—we struggled like stevedores to stow her up right in a corner. I don't know where the moisture came from, for the thirst was swelling my tongue against my teeth, but the

perspiration was guttering on both of us when we chinned ourselves out of the hatch, slapped down the hatch-cover and rushed to the thwart amidships to grab the oars. I guess I'd forgotten how tired I was. I guess I'd forgotten a lot of things. All I could think of was the living expression on that stone statue's face and what the art galleries would pay to see it.

"But we'll never make it," I groaned at Rallston as we pulled the barge out of the headland's shadow and set her blunt snout for open sea.

Off the bows that saffron fog was creeping in, and the long swells marched out from under the vapor banks like lava swishing molten out of steam. The barren headland, the junk-iron cliffs with that Valley of Death behind them, the Arab town at the end of the simitar beach made the backdrop for a play laid on the moon.

"If this is the Red Sea, we're miles out of the ship lane. Those Arabs will be after us like hounds when—"

Rallston laughed, and his laughter hardly sounded sane. Nothing was sane that midnight, I promise you.

"Suppose they do take after us—they didn't see us snaffle the woman, did they? There's other pirate ships on this waterway, and once in the fog we're safe."

My teeth were knocking together just the same, but premonitions aren't much good against thoughts of a million dollars. We pulled the blisters out on our palms, rowing out to reach that fog. We pulled with might and main, and the barge moseyed along like a Chinese junk, but we got there. I think the devil let us get there just to encourage us. Rallston had scuttled his religion for romance; I'd thrown over common sense for a fortune; both of us had fallen for the type of woman a man should let by: the devil encouraged us to let us down because we needed a lesson.

The lesson started just as we reached that yellow fog-bank. A Lilliputian chorus of howls splitting the silence along the shore. Torches dodging and darting along the beach. Arabs pouring down the miniature walls of that distant town like fireflies swarming out of a hive. Guns snapping in crackling strings like boxes of crackers suddenly exploding. They must have seen us, because little fountains plunked and spurted in our wake. Next minute their boats were out, oars flashing, spreading across the water like a horde of many-legged water-spiders heading seaward. A bullet cut an invisible violin-string over my head.

"Row!" Rallston yelled. "They're after us!"

We stabbed our oars into the brine, and the fog plunged over us at a sweep. The regatta was on!

It will be a long time before I forget that midnight row. The mist of that excursion is still in my head, and the prints of an oar-handle are branded on my palms. Have you ever been rowing at night when the wind dies and leaves the sea running when everything is quiet above the surging water? Add fog to the business and you have something downright uncanny. The fog we burrowed into that night was mysterious as smoke from Aladdin's lamp.

Shots crackled behind us as our bumboat collided with the fog-bank, and then it was precisely as if we had gone through a wall. A wall of gauze spread in layers above the wave-tops; then it was cotton, pulling, raveling, weaving around us as thick as an old man's beard. Deeper in, the fog was banked in piles like washed wool, great masses of aqueous wool heaped atop the water by invisible hands.

The wool swirled over us, dripping, smothery, silent. Kissed our faces, bandaged our heads, blurred Rallston to a shadow at my side. We were buried. Wrapped in a goose-flesh, creaming smother, opaque as the glass of a frosted lamp-bulb. A queer incandescence shone through the stuff. It wasn't blind. Perhaps like light seen by a cataracted eye. And there were rainbows, vague as the colors in an opal, arching in the formless clouds, the sort of other-world rainbows that moonbeams would cast.

On the thwart beside me, Rallston was pulling his oar with the automatic fury of someone pumping a colossal hand-car, and the teeth grinned in his errant face like a string of pearls.

"They'll never catch us now," he bawled at my ear. "Row! Don't slow down!"

We weren't slowing down because we'd never gone fast enough to admit any slowing, but an illusion of decreased momentum affected by fog was not dispelled by the armada I knew was whooping after us. I knew those Arab feluccas were coming like Indian war canoes, and I slammed my big blade in the sea with all the energy of fear. Don't think that barge with that shanghaied lady weighting the bows was any trifle to row. She wasn't a college shell. She plowed through the mist with the grace of a New York garbage scow butting a head sea of mud.

Rallston feathered his oar and sat with his ears cocked, listening. "Do you hear them coming?"

"I can't hear anything," I confessed.

It was remarkably quiet. We couldn't hear a trace of those bloodhounds we'd seen astern. We might have been barging through the sky, save for the wash of water hammocking by abeam and the little wallops of brine that smacked against the bow.

"They've missed us all right," Rallston chuckled. "It's been at least two hours since we saw 'em last, and they're off our course or they'd have overhauled us long ago. All we've got to do now is pick up a ship for Suez."

Of course there were a variety of other reasons why we might never pick up that ship. Conceivably, such a ship might pick us up in the vapor and slice us like a buzz-saw cutting cheese. Or we might be rowing in a circle. Or an Arab broadside might catch us out of the mist. But we didn't think of that.

It doesn't do to navigate when you're in love, and we were in love. Rallston was in love with the cynicism of our lady passenger, and I was in love with her money. It would pay me back for the rifles and equipment I'd lost. More than repay me. Do you know what I was thinking as I rowed myself black and blue in that fog? Not that I was a thief, I can tell you. I told myself I was stealing the woman because she was a great work of art, a super-masterpiece that belonged to the world.

And I was counting the dollars the world would pay for such a prize. The workmanship of the statue inspired me, but the dollars intoxicated me. No more grubbing with lizards. I had no more religion than my young assistant collector, that night! I was drunk as I rowed that barge.

At every mile and every hour, deeper and deeper in the fog, I grew drunker. Not from anything to drink, either. My mouth had been bone-dry when we'd launched the cruise, and a few hours exercising at the sweeps had turned my tongue to a herring.

The fog was something. Tantalizing. I wrung drops from my cuffs, licked the beads from my wrists, but the taste of water only aggravated thirst a hundred-fold. Just the devil's way of keeping us going. I'd have bartered my soul for a glass of wine, but everytime I thought of the statue in the forward hold I forgot I had a soul.

I guess the good Lord thought I'd better be reminded of it, for I got a little jolt about then. Rallston shipped his oar, flung a fist to my elbow, dragged me down on the seat, froze.

"Quiet!"

We hunkered down on the thwart and bulged our cheeks with

stified breath. A sound of rhythmic splashing obtruded on watered hush. Cambridge, Oxford, two dozen racing crews were going by somewhere. We caught the murmurous cantata of many voices, and there was the merest suggestion of a shadow off to starboard, as of the passage of a phantom ship tacking through imagination.

"It's them," Rallston gritted after an interval of baited silence. "Damn them, they're heading straight out. We've got to turn north."

"I don't see any compass in our binnacle," I choked. "How do you mean, turn north?"

We weren't doing any loud talking, believe you me. Rallston's words barely touched my ear. "A head sea coming in from the west when we put out. Take it on the port beam, we're going north. Row like hell."

For an hour that seemed a century we rowed like hell with the barge growing heavier every drag. As an extra goad to effort, the fog began to tear away in spots, rip and gray into fog-dogs—holes in the vapor where moonlight shafted down from a glimpse of open sky and our oar-blades crunched through a patch of glittering water dark as a whirlpool sighted at the bottom of a mine.

When we scowed through one of those openings we flattened like turtles on the thwart, holding breath, sick, expecting a fusillade from some mist-ambushed Arab craft to blow us out of water. But the enemy armada might have gone off into cloudland, set sail for the Pleiades. From the massed wool hemming us in there was only the sound of water underneath.

I don't know how long we played hide-and-seek through those fog-dogs, then, but I'd worn the flesh from my fingers, worked my spine numb and my tongue out—I'd have sworn we'd crossed the Atlantic—and I was dreaming of Paris again, when Rallston gave another cat-jump and blurted, "Land!"

I was a galley slave hanging on the oar-handle, cursing in disbelief. "Where?"

"Can't you hear what I hear, Farraday? Listen!"

"All I hear is running water," I husked. "I can't hear any—"

Then I caught it. A far-off muttering that had forced its echo through the fog from a distance of at least two miles, not unlike the long roll of muffled marching drums beating across a valley filled with rain.

Dilated, exultant, Rallston's eyes burned hot in his mist-smudged face.

"Surf!" he cheered the whisper. "Surf on a beach!" Leaping

upright, he sent a triumphant glare across our bow, pointing a shaky finger dead ahead. "That's Egypt, by God; we've made the other side. We've done it, Farraday! Brought her over. Land! We're saved!"

Only we weren't saved yet. Not by a jugful. Rather, not by a boat-ful! His cheer wasn't out of his teeth when the barge broke through a rift in the mist, drifted out into a patch of moonlight. I don't know why I looked down at that moment. Not till then did I realize my feet were wet; I suppose my subconscious mind had been trying to tell me, but I'd been having too good a time in Paris.

Well, I'd heard a sound of water under the fog, and it was running, all right. Running right into the boat! Boiling up through the bottom-boards and gurgling in through the seams at about two quarts a minute. Too long that craft had been beached in the tropic sun. The weather on that scrap-iron coast had eaten the pitch and gnawed the timbering. Those planks were drinking in brine like thirsty blotting paper. The bilge was up to my bootlaces when I looked, and I pulled my feet out with a yell. Rallston looked down and squalled:

"Holy Moses! We're leaking!"

That barge was something more than leaking. Having sprung one leak, the whole motheaten hull had opened the rest of its seams; gone porous as the Dutch boy's dike. Stealthily, lazily as a hippopotamus submerging, the craft had begun to sink!

Well, we were in for it this time, and Paris in the spring vanished right out of the bubble in my head. Picture that situation if you can. A girl-crazy lunatic and a naturalist who should have known better trying to kidnap a stone goddess in a scow of cardboard. Fog on a lost planet sea, and Arab pirates liable to be anywhere, and our ship going down. Lord, how that bumboat was drinking in the brine. It liked the taste. It had started slowly and developed a liking, and now it was gulping the stuff by the gallon.

"Bail!" Rallston yelled, giving me a shove that knocked me off the thwart. "I'll do the rowing. Get that water out of here. Bail like the devil."

He snatched the oars and started pulling like a madman, while I bailed in the sternsheets like Noah's pump. I used my sun helmet to scoop with, and I might as well have tried to empty the Indian Ocean with a soup spoon. All the water I could jettison simply ducked down under our keel and sneaked in again, bringing a fresh supply with it. The seams were widening by the second, and I labored like an up-and-down in a Scotch freighter, dipping and throwing, dipping and

throwing, with no more result than to see the intake rise to my ankles and start for my shins.

"She's going down," I had to pant. "It's coming in faster all the time. She's up two inches since I started."

Rallston slammed the oars into the swells and pulled as if to uproot the sea from its bed.

"We've got to make that shore off there, d'you hear? We can't lose that woman now!"

For the following half hour we fought to beat that sea inside and out, but it had us coming and going. Land was ahead of us somewhere, no doubt of that. An echo of combers on a beach as difficult of attainment as Paradise. It wasn't for those who took the easy road. Our barge was too heavy for that ocean in the clouds. At each new swell the drunken hulk would shudder and stagger and swallow other gallons.

"Get out of the trough," Rallston shouted at me from the stern. "Another like that last on the beam and we'll go down."

I pulled my arms out to get her around, but she seemed to be settling in glue by that time, reluctant to swing. "I'm going to get that woman ashore if we drown in forty fathoms," I said. "It's too late to bail. We've got to lighten the boat."

You know how balloonists throw ballast out of the baskets in the sky? You should have seen Rallston throwing ballast out of that sinking barge to keep us afloat. First he got that iron spear we'd stolen from the Arab guard—dragged that spear out from under the thwart, splashed by me to scramble to the higher ground of the foredeck where he chopped down our mast. Crack! Sail, cordage, boom and tackle went overside, splashing off in the mist. The anchor went next, followed by the watercask, a length of chain, a box of rusted spikes, anything he could lay fingers on.

Do you think those pounds of junk more or less made any difference in that situation? I thought of the half-ton cargo in our forward hold, and it made me sick. Rallston stiffened upright in the stern-sheets. He must have been thinking of the same thing.

"There's not much else to throw out," he said.

I didn't say anything. The water was lapping the thwart, and my mouth was filled with a taste like dry quinine.

"There's not much else to throw out," Rallston repeated in the same squeaky tone. "But her—" he pointed at the foredeck "*—and she's not going.*"

My lips cracked like an old cup as I grinned at him. "Right. She's not going."

"But there's too much weight," Rallston whispered. "Somebody's got to go."

I nodded, rising slowly from the thwart.

"And *she's* not the one that's going!" he squalled.

Water showered under our boots and we hit each other at the same time.

Now I'm not going to beg off responsibility in that assault by claiming I was crazy. I think we were both crazy as bobcats when we went for each other—I'm certain we were—but it was the brand of craziness that comes from playing with money and women, and the judges won't take it as an excuse. What do you think the Admiralty Board would say of two boys who tried to throw each other overside to save a statue on a sinking barge?

Wham! That Australian boy's fist was chain-mailed. The blow drove me backward with the force of a donkey's kick, and flung me head-over-heels over the thwart, smack down under three feet of bilge.

The bath cleared my wits a little, and I came up dragged and coughing in time to catch Rallston's rebound from the stern. His face looked madder than the grimace of Cain. A thread of blood leaked from one splayed nostril where my knuckles had contacted, and his grin seemed composed of a thousand teeth.

Gabled under a roof of wet hair that streamed in two dark triangles on either temple, his eyes had contracted, dwindled to sharp points of green glass imbedded in a face hot as a boilerplate. Jaw out, snorting, fingers spread, he flung himself at me.

"She's mine! I found her, you perishin' jackal! Think you can pitch me overside, do you? She belongs to me!"

"You woman-crazy, triple-blasted fool!"

I howled, trying to fist him off. We fought. Slashed and slugged, wrestled, kicked, tore, each striving to knock the other over the gun-wales. We weren't the first young men to go mad over a million dollars and a woman.

I'd like to have been a disinterested witness to the duel that followed. I'd like to have seen that battle aboard a barge sinking under opalescent fog, the oar-blades stabbing, whipping parabolas of light through mist, slashing together overhead, splinters shearing, slivers flying, the crack of wood on wood, the smack of wood on bone. What a joust that was! What a gallant contest of knights! What a lady for

a prize, and what a field of honor! It sickens me to think of it now.

Older men wouldn't have lasted. Only healthy young animals could give and take such a pounding. In those days I was wiry, and my skull topped Rallston's by an inch. Life in the open had stored a lot of energy in my hide. He was built for an athlete, muscled like an orang-utan. My blows only enraged and confused him. His vitality seemed unquenchable. I punished his arms with criss-cross strokes, pounded his knuckles, couldn't chop his weapon from his fists. He beat me to my knees, crushed the ears flat on my head, brought the eyebrows swelled down over my lids, but he couldn't whip me out.

"Mine!" He brought the words with red bubbles through his teeth. "The woman—all—mine—"

"No, Rallston. No!" My head was too sick to shake. As if by a common reflex we lifted the oars. Stood swaying. A dark hill of water swept out of the mists to starboard, and the finish came. That finish came out of the fog, a chorus of howls breaking loose in the smother off the bow. The *plash, plash, plash* of a multitude of paddles. Shadows shooting in from all directions like mammoth shark-fins moving up through mist. Rows and files of merciless brown faces conjured out of vapor, and then the whole yowling regatta of dhows, nuggers, feluccas and sampans circling around us and engulfing us in a traffic jam as wild as a tie-up on the Yangtze Kiang.

I never saw so many rifles aimed at my head at one time. So many brandished knives. A hook-beaked Arab colossus, brown as a penny, black-whiskered, wearing a turban, was a figurehead posed in the foresheets of the nearest boat. His simitar looked bigger than a new moon. He had grabbed up to heaven and caught that tremendous crescent in his hand. He let out a roar of coughing Arabic at his boatmen; his galley scraped along side our half-submerged stern and he boarded us with the agility of a corsair.

"The image," he roared in guttural English. "We come for the sacred image, *feringi!* Return thy theft quickly, spawn of unholiness, and prepare to die!"

Myself, I prepared to die. I found no time to wonder at this Arabian behemoth's English, unexpected to that climax as a British accent on Mars. I didn't even wonder why our barge didn't plunge straight down under the weight of the pirate and his simitar. My neck was bared under that moon-sized blade, and I was too lame and

tired to move. If the flooded bumboat didn't sink, my heart did then, and I couldn't lift my head off the thwart.

Rallston moved. I tell you, that Australian devil had more animation left in his hide than a wounded tiger. He lifted his broken head, and even laughed. Sprawled besides me on the rowing seat, he reared up at the headsman towering over us and chewed a sound of mirth through his teeth.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he chattered at Blackbeard, "but if you don't get off this boat in half a nip she'll sink to the bottom. You understand English, you whisker-faced shark? Then understand you're talking to Captain Rallston of his Britannic Majesty's Corps of Signals and this is Lieutenant Farraday of the American Observation Service. There's an official camera under this seat to prove it, understand? We're on military assignment and got wrecked in this fog, and by God, if you know what's good for you, you'll call off your pirates and have us put ashore."

It was a good bluff. A remarkable bluff. That boy was a super salesman, and when I think of how he blustered and stalled, half fainting and trapped on that foundering barge, I have to take my hat off to his gall. We were caught with the goods, but my lady-stealer wasn't licked yet. If he could stall a few more seconds the evidence would go down like the *Titanic* and we might get away.

He conjured a look of innocence on his pounded face that would have done credit to a saint. You'd have thought this Arab chieftain was no more than some irate papa who'd caught Rallston eloping with his daughter, but the girl was safely hidden behind the scenes. Image? What image did our visiting admiral mean? Sacred image? Where?

It didn't fool Blackbeard any more than Rallston had expected it would—that sheik knew we weren't any Captain Rallston and Lieutenant Farraday innocently wrecked to blacken eyes and crush noses in the fog. What Rallston did expect was that our bumboat would go down like a plummet, and the bumboat refused to oblige. It wallowed level with the waterline while brine burbled over the stern and we clung to the thwart like rats on a raft. Blackbeard belted his simitar on a sash under his cloak and listened to Rallston's story with folded arms. Then,

"Move once," he snarled, "and my men will shoot the truthless heads from your shoulders. *Wah!* That would be a mercy compared to the tortures awaiting those thieves who dared steal the ancient image from the tribe of Haram esh-Shereef! The proof of that guilt will not be far distant, *ferengi*, and by Allah's Holy Prophet! I think

your blood will flow when I see what cargo lies hidden beneath that forward hatch!"

He bellowed at his followers to train their rifles for a broadside, then went scrambling and splashing to the bumboat's foredeck, and ripped up the hatch-cover. He jumped down the hatch with a savage yell, and his armada of pirates shrieked with the glad prospect of a chance to torture the Christians when they saw him go. It was all up now. Overhead the fog was dissolving in watery lights as if the dawn were trying to get through and make two scoundrels sorry they were seeing it for the last time. I pushed my bruised face down on the thwart, cold to the marrow.

"Rallston," I gibed him bitterly, "what do you think of your dream-girl, now I wish I'd killed you before they do."

"I won't go down prayin', anyway," he sneered from a corner of his bruised mouth. "I'll leave you do the howlin' to heaven for a miracle that won't come. I'll go to the devil like a man."

There was a submarine splash as Blackbeard lit in the flooded hold, and I could hear Rallston cursing the hulk because it didn't sink. I listened to that Arab chief trampling and wading down under the hatch; heard snorts, muffled exclamations, a fierce yell. Then I don't exactly recall how it happened. To Judgment Day I'll never forget the sight of that Arab's head bellowing up out of that hatch, the picture of him climbing up to the foredeck like a buffalo rising from a manhole, turban over one ear, cloak soaked to the armpits from immersion down below, paddling, puffing, his face—have you ever seen an Arab who found himself cheated in a deal? An Arab who'd watered the wrong way?

He struck his forehead with a fist and glared dramatically up at the sky. Despair, humiliation, anxiety, fury fought for predominance on his features. It takes a raging Arab to speak in a voice of humility. He wrung his hands, stamped at Rallston and me, and wrung his hands. Truly, there had been a wretched mistake. Allah forgive this unwarranted assault on the *feringi*. It was the fog, the cursed fog which deluded the eye, making lambs appear as wolves.

Could Captain Rallston and Lieutenant the *Amerikani* and the emperors of both England and America—on whom be the blessing—pardon him an error caused by fog? Of course, now the day-light was coming, we did not in the least resemble thieves. But had we by chance passed other small boats in the dark? What? The *feringi* had seen many others? Then by the Three-Fingered Hand of the

Wife of the Prophet, there was no more time to lose! He would be delighted to assist us to shore, but there was not the time.

Salaam! Salaam! Farewell!

My next visual impression, that Blackbeard figurehead was back in the bows of its felucca. I give you my word, that Arab made a flying leap back to his own boat; I saw the pointed rifles withdraw like claws going into sheaths; saw those wolf-faced boatmen snatch their oars, sails go up like flags, paddles smack into the sea. Bag and baggage, that Arab pirate took leave.

He took the fog with him. His boats towed it after them as they rocked away, pulling the vapors astern to screen their departure. I was aware of pale blue sky opening overhead. Sunlight sifted fans of gold over a cloud to warm a spreading view of waves. In the east where the fog was retreating the Arabs were no longer visible. For a long time I lay immobile, staring at the place where Blackbeard and his fleet had gone.

Then I turned my head very carefully, and surprised a coastline off the bow. Not half a mile away a glimmering beach, where quiet surf laundered white rocks and olive trees stood green atop a cliff and distant hills sloped violet in bright air.

The shore looked virtuous and peaceful. It had no affinity to that coast of our embarkation. Sunshine on water. Sparkling wavelets. Goats posed on rocks, and there was a pastel house among the olives. We had drifted from a land of goblins into another sphere. Only the sunken hull bearing us toward this sunny beach remained as evidence to last night's nightmare.

"Rallston," I whispered tentatively, wanting to make sure.

But it wasn't a dream. He voiced a sound like a croak to let me know he was there, and I screwed around on the seat to find him kneeling on the bottom-boards in bilge, arms hugging the thwart as if afraid to let go, head thrust forward, eyes staring. Drying brine had left a deposit like diamond-dust sparking in the tangles of his hair, so that his head glowed in the sun as if immortally crowned by some manner of halo. His face looked something immortal, too, crusted, swollen, harlequinned with rainbow-colored welts. His eyes, stuck in their sockets, were made of glass.

"Farraday," he whispered, "did you see some Arabs around here?"

"I thought—"

"Did a big black-whiskered devil jump down into the hold and— and climb out and go away?"

"It seemed to me—"

"Come on."

The hatch was open, and we crawled on hands and knees. Rallston groaned as he chinned himself down, and as I lowered myself after him, day came across the sky in a yellow blaze and the air was filled with light. You can't dream tropical sunlight, but the scene in that bumboat's flooded cargo hold had to be a dream. Sunshine poured down through the hatch overhead to fill the square enclosure with brilliance, and the water was clear and crystalline as a sea cave under the Bermudas. That six-by-six hold was shoulder-deep in water, water that had leaked in through the seams in the hull, but the planking was solid on the walls and bottom, and a half-ton statue too heavy for a single man to lift can't get out through cracks.

Now laugh when I tell you that statue wasn't there. Laugh when I tell you that wonderful sculptured woman with her "come and get me, I dare you" expression wasn't standing in the corner where Rallston and I had stowed her. No man could have budged that image. It had wanted block and tackle to get her aboard. Rallston hadn't touched her, nor had I; and Blackbeard had departed with empty hands. The statue had departed, too. She wasn't in her corner, or the other three corners; she wasn't on the floor. There was something about the size of a lily pad and about the thickness of a thin pie crust floating over the surface where the woman had been.

I stood with Rallston chest-deep in the water of that hold, sunlight cracking down through the hatch and ricocheting in white crescents off the little wavelets to make dancing reflections on the deck timbers overhead—I stood with Rallston in that boxed-in pond, and we stared. How we stared!

It wasn't any pie crust, I can tell you. Can you imagine the skim of some white powder floating on the surface of a pool? Or the skin of a human face, the top-layer, say, of a death mask set floating in brine? The back of that mask was gone. The body wasn't there. Just the last outer film, the merest suggestion of that face remained afloat, as if sketched on the eddying ripples by a few strokes of dusty chalk.

"Look!" Rallston screamed, pointing at it. "Look!"

I saw it, all right. Misty as a photograph in smoke. An expression set adrift. The face of a woman looking over her shoulder, daring someone to "get" her—a mirage looking up at us from crystalline brine. Rallston's cry tore out of his throat in one exorcised devil of

sound. Together we sprang. Together we rushed at that thing, hands out, like children trying to catch a reflection in a lake.

It was I who caught it. How I caught it! I tripped over Rallston's boots and dived headlong, full face into that smoky expression, smack on the mouth. Those phantom lips in a phantom sneer! Can you see how it was? My face went into that thing and I closed howling lips on a mouthful of brine I'll not forget when the last trump blows. I swallowed a gulp of seawater that would have sickened a whale. I broke that pie crust face into a million particles; drank half of it; spluttered to the surface with that "come get me, I dare you" expression showering out of my fingers, pouring through my hair.

Rallston got some of it, himself. He flung a hand to his mouth and went up out of the hatch as if fired from a catapult. He was scrubbing his face when I pulled out of the bath to stand beside him, and that Australian renegade looked sick as a dog. Both of us did.

"Melted," he whispered. "My God—"

"That's why the barge didn't sink," I groaned. "This *isn't* the Red Sea! Do you know that coast over there?"

"I know," he said thickly. "Palestine! It's the *Dead Sea*!"

"That valley last night—"

"Gomorrah!"

We was praying on his knees when I went overboard. He fell to his knees as if he'd been sniped through the spine, and as I swam for the beach I looked back and saw him there. Kneeling on the deck of that half-sunk barge, face to the sky.

I didn't look back again. On the beach, I ran. There would be a well near that house among the olives, and I wanted a drink to wash that woman's expression from my mouth. But I'll never wash it out. Never! To this day my mouth burns with the taste, and I can see her face, defiant still, as my face fell to smash it in that bumboat's bilge.

When Farraday stopped speaking, the twilight had melted to darkness in a miracle of its own, the Red Sea vanishing to a path of bubbling phosphorus in the liner's wake. The tall mountain abeam was a shadow under a star, and somewhere within reach of that shadow, before the days of the Suez Canal, the Children of Israel had run dry-shod between waves, while the following chariots of Pharoah were engulfed.

A bar of yellow light came from the steering-engine house and

put a shining hard scar down the naturalist's profiled jaw. Mendel, the metallurgist, stared at his companion's face. His lips felt cold on the question.

"You mean that statue—it dissolved?"

Farraday nodded. "The water finished what those fanatical Arabs had been preserving in that cave for centuries. That southern coast of the Red Sea goes back in history. It isn't a part of Palestine you read about in guide books. Nobody'd go there but a couple of young fools who'd lost their way. That land was cursed in Genesis."

The metallurgist winced as Farraday gripped him by the shoulder.

"You and your winds and tides!" the naturalist rasped. "You'll say some wandering Greek in the days of Praxiteles carved that image out of rock and left it there. Well, Praxiteles was an amateur compared to the hand that did that sculpturing. The greatest sculptor in the universe did that statue. Only the greatest creative artist in the universe could have captured that 'come and get me' expression in rock."

Farraday's eyes were bleak in the dimness. "And what kind of rock melts away? What kind of rock would disappear in the hold of a sinking bumboat and run out through the cracks? Not the kind of rock that Rallston's faith is built on, I can promise you. That atheistic, romance-crazy Australian was on his knees when I left him that day, and he's praying yet, from one end of Australia to the other. They say he's the greatest evangelist to ever start a crowd down the sawdust trail—his wife is a shy little woman who plays the organ—and a man has to be pretty sincere to pray in public these hardbitten days. I heard him recently on the radio, and what do you think his sermons are about? Miracles! His belief in miracles! Do you know what he uses for his text?"

Cold prickles moved up the metallurgist's skin. He waited with his mouth open a little.

Farraday was pointing toward the coast that was a shadow under a star, pointing in the direction of Arabia and the country beyond Arabia and the sea beyond that. His voice was low, husky on the quoted passage.

"And it came to pass . . . that he said, Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain lest thou be consumed. . . . But Lot's wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."

THE END

Few men may be said to have become a legend while they were still living and writing. It is uncontested, however, that "Max Brand" belongs to that small, select handful. His real name was Frederick Faust, but that is only incidental, because his wide, rich treasure of published stories appeared under no less than 26 different pen names, of which Max Brand is probably the most familiar and beloved.

What can one say to properly evaluate a writer who became famous with his first published story, a man who could so marvelously vary his craft that he could write for the popular action magazines under dozens of pen names, sell novel length stories to big national smooth paper magazines, project himself firmly into the Hollywood writing firmament and sell poems and essays which are still remembered in esoteric ivory tower little magazines—all at the same time.

The man known as Max Brand died in front of Cassino carrying on a dangerous on-the-spot war correspondent assignment for which he had volunteered. There are people who believe that on that day perished one of the finest writing minds our generation has seen.

The Strange Loves of Beatrice Jervan

By Max Brand

The old servant stopped and faced him. The light from the candle he carried flickered across his bald head as he nodded wonderingly, and John Ovington hardly repressed a smile.

"You are quite sure you were never in the house before?" asked Hillton.

"No," said Ovington, "I was never here before, but somehow it seems to me that a big amber-colored vase with black figures tracing

down the sides should stand by that window. It's just a fancy, but rather unusual in its clearness."

"The Ovingtons are an unusual family, sir," said Hillton, and he raised his candle so that its light fell more fully on the sternly carven face of his new master. After his moment's scrutiny he shook his head as one who gives up a problem.

"A vase like the one you speak of stood there ever since the house was built, but last week Mrs. Worth broke it while she was cleaning the room. Every week I have the rooms cleaned, sir, but for the past year they have never been used, none except the kitchen and Mr. Ovington's bedroom where he lay sick for so long."

"And died?" said Ovington.

"And died, sir. He wouldn't trust any one save me. I wrote the letter which brought you here, and I signed it for him."

"I shall never forget that letter," said Ovington. "And that is the room where I sleep now?"

"The master has always slept in that room since the family came here to live," he answered. "Now I think you have seen the whole house, Mr. Ovington."

"But isn't there a room behind those folding doors?" asked Ovington.

"That is the library, and it hasn't been opened these past fifteen years. Fifteen dreary years, sir. It must be fearful thick with dust."

"And why has it been closed all this time?"

"That was the time when young Master Ovington died, and since then the master couldn't bear to go into that room. For the family pictures hang there, and he couldn't stand to look at them, he having lost his heir. The family name ended with him, as he thought. It was only through the lawyers that we traced the line to you, sir, through your great-grandfather, John Ovington, the man who disappeared."

"So I understand," said Ovington. "But let's have a look at the room."

Hillton drew in his wrinkled lips anxiously.

"Tonight, sir?"

"Why not?"

"It's a fearsome place to go into at night with all the stern old Ovingtons painted and hanging on the wall. It's most like a graveyard, sir, with the ghosts up and sitting on their tombs, I'm sure you will not like it in there at night, Mr. Ovington."

"Tut!" smiled Ovington, and he laid a reassuring hand on the old man's shoulder. "We'll risk the dust and the family pictures."

It was only after much reluctant fumbling and many sidewise glances as if in hope that Ovington's resolution would die away that Hillton finally produced the key. The lock had set so fast that it required a great effort for Ovington to send it gritting back. He swung the door wide and stepped into the high, dark room. The wavering light behind him made him turn to Hillton, who stood outside the door, the candle fairly shaking in his hand.

"Come, come!" laughed Ovington. "It's only a room with nothing more dangerous in it than shadows."

"No, sir," said Hillton, "I'm not afraid. But it's a strange house and a strange family."

He entered slowly, the candle held high above his head, peering about at every step.

Into the highest shadows of the raftered ceiling the wavering candlelight hardly reached, but it shone on the ponderous table, thickly dusted, and into the black throat of the fireplace, and picked out the long row of portraits receding dimly on either side of the room. Among them were a few dressed in the ruffs of the Tudor period. Others appeared in somber Puritan gray, straight faces under tall hats. Among these one caught Ovington's eyes. He took the candle from Hillton and held it close to the portrait.

He thought for a moment that he himself had dressed for a fancy ball and stood now before this mirror, for it was his own face which returned his gaze with a half scowl and a half sneer, the same strong nose, thin cheeks, and unflinching eyes. He blinded himself with his hand and looked again, but the resemblance persisted. He felt that his forehead had grown very cold.

"Who is this?" he asked, wondering if the servant would notice the resemblance.

"That is your great-grandfather, whose name was John Ovington, like your name," said Hillton, forgetting his uneasiness as he talked. "He was the strangest of all the Ovingtons, for he rode away one day and never came back, and that is the last people ever heard of him. All that was many, many years ago."

Hillton led the way to the window and drew aside the curtain, loosing a cloud of dust. Outside the moon glimmered on garden terraces, which stepped down to a tree-covered hollow, but the other side of the valley rose dark and steep, with a great square house topping it.

"That is the Jervan house," said Hillton, and his pointing hand trembled in the moonlight. "That is the house where Beatrice Jervan

lived, who was the sweetheart of that John Ovington of those old days, but John Ovington went across the seas and fought in France. So when he came back Beatrice Jervan loved him no longer, and they say that he would have forced her to marry him, for he was a stark, fierce man; but she fled away in the night with another man. And John Ovington waited for them at a forking of the Newbury Road as they fled on their horses. He stopped them and would have made them turn back, but the man drew a horse-pistol and shot him through the shoulder and rode on with Beatrice Jervan, and God knows what became of them both. We only know that a granddaughter of that couple married back into the Jervan family, and now there is a Beatrice Jervan over there again in that house; and over here—" he laughed tremendously in the moonlight—"is a John Ovington again.

"Well, when the man rode on with Beatrice that other John Ovington rose up from the road where he had fallen and called after them: 'I have failed this time, but I shall not fail twice. I shall come again. I shall wait for you in this place, Beatrice Jervan, and carry you away with me.'

"But he never did, for shortly afterward he took ship in Boston Harbor and went across the sea to other countries. He was your great-grandfather. All that he left was this picture on the wall and a little cedar chest of his papers which sits on that shelf next to the brass-bound Bible. He was the last of the old family, for after him his cousin took the name and the inheritance."

Through a long moment, John Ovington stood staring at the opposite house.

"I am going to stay here and read some of those papers," he said at last, "so you can leave the candle, Hillton."

"Will you sit here alone, sir, on your first night?"

He folded his hands in his anxiety, and when Ovington nodded he turned and went falteringly from the room, shaking his head solemnly.

On top of the papers in the small chest lay a miniature of a girl. It had evidently at one time been a bust painted by an artist of some skill, but the lower part of the picture was rubbed and faded beyond the recognition of any form. Only the face remained clear. The hair drew back from the forehead in the severe lines which pleased those grim old New Englanders, and the eyes drooped demurely downward, but no moral preceptor could lessen the curve and the lure of the

red lips. It seemed to Ovington that the eyes might at any moment flash up and yield him unknown depths of light and mockery.

He dropped the miniature to his knee and sat for a time looking straight before him. When he had rallied his thoughts he commenced to turn over the papers. They were all letters written in a woman's hand, and despite the yellowing of time and the fading of the ink, he could make out the words with little effort. Arranged in the order of their receipt, the letters told their own story of the love between Beatrice Jervan and John Ovington.

There was a long group covering the period of the wooing, and then came the time when Ovington decided to go to the war, and this letter :

"I could not say it last night. I needed quiet so that I could think it all out clearly, and now I know what I wanted to say. You must not go to the war, John, dear.

"I know that glory is a wonderful thing, but a good wife is a wonderful thing, too, John, and would you care to win glory and lose a wife? Not that I am sure you would lose me; but I love happiness, dear, and I am afraid of pain; and if you were thousands and thousands of miles away, what would I have to remember you by? It is so hard to remember a man by his silences, John!

"Dear, will you try to please me in this? And then I will try to please you all the days of my life. But the sea is so broad, and the French shoot so straight—and I do so love laughter, John! Come to me tonight, and I know I can change your mind."

He rose and walked with the candle until he faced the picture of John Ovington. Yes, that was the face of a man able to defy the charm of sudden glances and slow smiles. He went back to the letters. They diminished rapidly in length, and then came this :

"If you want me, you must come and fight for me, Captain John Ovington. There may be dreadful fighting on the plains of France, but I think you will find enough war here on the hills of Connecticut. He has yellow, curling hair, John, and wide, blue eyes, and a gentle voice and a ringing laugh, and he's as much of a man as you are, almost. If you want me, you must come for me. It may be too late, I can't tell."

Then came a short note.

"You need not come. It is too late!"

But John Ovington had decided to come back and try, and after his return were two letters, the last:

"If you will not come to see me, John Ovington, I shall come to see you; though if I do that I know that mother will faint.

"I think I have never seen so grave a man as the John Ovington I met on the bridge the other day. Have you truly forgotten me? All grave men are not silent, John Ovington. I have a plan to discover if you can really smile.

"I will be by the fountain in the garden tonight if it is not too cold."

And John Ovington had evidently changed his mind that night and gone to the garden and made desperate love, hoping against hope, for the last letter said:

"Vincent Colvin has been with me all this morning. I am going to ride away with him tonight. I have not forgotten, but I promised myself to him long ago, and now I shall keep the promise. My father objects, so we are going to go out for a ride from which we shall never come back, and we will take the Newbury Road. Oh, my dear, it breaks my heart to ride out of your life. It has all been so strange, so maddeningly dear and painful. Must this be good-by?"

He read no more that night, but he sat a long time at the window, watching the night mist creep up the valley, tangling among the trees, and at last setting a gray veil across the window-pane.

The next morning the challenge of the keen October air drew him out into the open. In the stables he found a great black charger and had him saddled. The groom eyed him dubiously as he lengthened his stirrups to suit his western fashion of riding, but when he swung into the saddle and started down the path with his broad hat curling up in front to the wind and his cloak fluttering behind him, while his practiced pull on the reins held down the horse to an uneasy prance, the groom grinned with open admiration.

"I reckon an Ovington," he said, "is always an Ovington."

But as he took the road down the valley Ovington could not forget the adventure of the previous evening, for the Connecticut hills rolled up on either side, a remembered beauty of yellowing browns,

gold, and crimson running riotously together, and all the trees still shining with the touch of the night mist. The great lift and sway of the gallop set his heart singing in unison with the hoofbeats. He could not tell how far he had ridden, for every bend invited him on and on down flaming vistas.

He passed from the main road on to a narrow path which, after a quarter of a mile, veered to the left, and around a quick turn he thundered across a stream on a narrow foot-bridge, a frail structure which tottered and shook under him. At the same time he heard the clatter of hoofs coming toward him down the same path and in a moment a racing brown horse flashed about the curve and dashed onto the bridge.

It was far too narrow a path for two horses to edge by each other. He brought his mount to a rearing stop, head to head with the black; and he was face to face with the loveliest girl he had ever seen. Hers was a remembered beauty—yes, the face of the miniature he had seen in his ancestor's papers. A spray of autumn leaves at her breast stirring as she panted.

"This is a real escape, isn't it?" she cried, and her voice carried more mirth than fear.

"I guess it's an escape," he said quietly, after another moment of staring. "Here, there is not room for two to pass. I'll back off the bridge."

But, as he drew on the reins his horse reared straight up, and when he came down stiff-legged the little bridge wavered and groaned.

"Don't do that!" she cried, now truly frightened. "I'll back off."

She backed her horse cautiously, step by step, and he followed, but when they came onto the path again he still blocked the way and the puzzled searching of his eyes made her flush slightly.

"Your name is Beatrice Jervan," he stated.

"Yes," she said.

"And mine is John Ovington."

She clapped her hands in delighted discovery.

"Are you really the new John Ovington? Let's shake hands and be friends. We're neighbors, you know."

He rode beside her and took her hand. He knew that she was saying:

"But you are a stranger here. How did you know my name?"

He smiled vaguely on her. "Can you tell me how old this bridge is?"

"Yes," she said, wondering. "It is said to be a hundred and fifty years old. But I doubt it."

"Well," he said, "I feel as if I had known you for one hundred and fifty years."

"With that soft hat and that riding-cloak," she laughed, "you look as if you might be a bandit of that period."

"With that smile," he said, "you look as if you might be a woman of almost any period. May I ride with you?" he continued. "If I may I'll try not to say any more foolish things."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "It's the October air that makes one happy without knowing just why. Of course you may ride with me."

They walked back across the bridge again and up onto the road. As they broke into a canter he fell back a little to watch the lilt of her perfect horsemanship.

"If you ride so far back I can't talk to you," she complained, "and then you'll think I'm stupid."

"You don't have to talk," he said. "I'm perfectly entertained, and besides—"

But she spurred her horse to a wild gallop and the rest of his sentence was jolted from his mind as he pursued. The long stride of the black brought him beside her in a few seconds.

"You ride well," he shouted as he reined in to her pace, "but you see you can't escape me."

She slowed down rather sullenly.

"I have never been passed before on these roads," she said.

"Not passed," he corrected; "merely caught."

She accepted the comment with an enigmatic glance. He rode a little behind her, perfectly happy and perfectly silent. A keen wind rose and whirled down the valley to meet them. Sometimes the force of the gust seemed to sway her back in her saddle. From stirrup to head she gave in graceful lines to the sway and lunge of the gallop, and Ovington ground his teeth to keep from singing aloud. It seemed hardly a moment before she checked her horse.

"Our ways part here," she said, then smiling: "Are you always silent, Mr. Ovington?"

He raised his hat without replying, wheeled, and spurred up the hill, and she remained for a breathing space watching the play of his broad shoulders as he rode.

Through the next ten days he wandered about the old Ovington place uneasily. He could hardly define his own mood. He felt vaguely that he was waiting, but he had not the slightest idea for what. But on the tenth day a letter came and he knew. He recognized the hand-

writing, but before he dared to tear it open he went first to the little cedar chest and compared the two scripts.

They were identical.

The letter began without prelude just as the other letter came to that other John Ovington a hundred and fifty years before:

"If you will not come to see me, John Ovington, I shall come to see you."

A red mist came before him. He felt himself trembling as a child would, and it was some time before he could resume the reading. Without a single variation the letter repeated the time-yellowed manuscript of the cedar chest.

"I think I have never seen so grave a man. All grave men are not silent, John Ovington. I have a plan to discover if you can really smile. I will be in the garden tonight if it is not too cold."

"I will not go," he said aloud, as if to convince himself. "I will not let this damned riddle ruin me as it ruined a John Ovington four generations before me."

He commenced to pace up and down the room. According to the old story he should go to that garden tonight and make desperate love to her. And according to that story he was lost in the end.

Ovington tried to rally his reason. He tried to convince himself that this was all a weird dream, but the two letters lay convincingly side by side. Had the spirit of the old John Ovington truly come back to try the old task again? Would there be for him the same agony of heart and mind? He covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud, for he saw again the spray of autumn leaves stirring at her breast.

After supper he went into the library to fight out the night there, but the old portraits leered down at him, the little cedar chest loomed like a silent oracle of sorrow. He rose at last and went out to pace the terraces of the garden.

His foot sounded hollowly over the little bridge across the river, but he did not notice it. Unconsciously he wandered up the path on the other side of the valley, through the opening of the hedge of evergreen, and onto the velvet lawns of the Jervan estate.

A light laugh only a few feet away startled him into vivid consciousness. He found that he stood near a circle of shrubbery, in the center of which a fountain splashed and showered, and through the light

falling of the spray he heard the thrilling velvet of Beatrice Jervan's voice :

"Go away now, Vincent. I so want to be alone."

A pleasant voice answered, "Have I wearied you tonight, dear?"

"No," she answered, "but I am tired of saying pretty things and hearing them, just for a little while. I am hungry for the quiet and chill of this air. Please go back to the house and tell them that I am taking a walk through the garden. They will understand."

"And I shall see you later? You are not cold?"

"You will see me later. I am not the least cold."

"*Au revoir* a little while. Dear, I am full of strange thoughts tonight. It is almost as if you were slipping away from me. I have reached out to you a hundred times, and my heart has closed on nothing. What does it mean?"

"Fantasy!" she said, and as she laughed, the sound broke and ran trilling down like the musical chuckle of a bird.

"You need not fear. I shall stay true to our plan. *Adieu*."

Ovington heard the man's light step pass away over the lawn, the shrubbery brushing against him noisily, and then the silence slipped back over the place and the faintly moving air shook the fountain into light showerings of spray, felt rather than heard. A great yellow moon floated up through the branches of the eastern trees, took in the changing tracery of the black limbs, and brightened the silvery, nodding head of the fountain.

Deeper and deeper slanted the light until he saw it glimmer like a dark star in the hair of Beatrice.

She raised her head up to meet that light. It fell on her face like a sculptured smile, and Ovington stood breathless, watching, waiting, with a musical dread in his heart. Then the dark fur which clung against her throat shifted and the shadow on the lifted eyes changed. He stepped into the circle of the shrubbery and stood before her, and she, looking up, saw the black outline of his head against the rolling moon.

"You are for all the world like a man come down from the moon," she said, and her voice was so low that she seemed to be talking to herself.

He stood for a long moment before he could speak. "And who," he asked, "is dear Vincent?"

"Vincent is a very nice boy," she answered, "who has yellow curling hair and wide blue eyes and is as much of a man as you are, John Ovington."

He dropped into the stone seat beside her and leaned forward, his hands clasped and his eyes on the ground. He was so perilously near her that she could mark the tensed lips and the set jaw of his profile, but the wide brim of his hat put all the rest of his face in shadow. She watched his strongly interlaced fingers.

"So you are a silent man, John Ovington?"

"I am thinking very hard," he answered.

"Yes, you are troubled about something?" He felt the perfume and touch of her breath as she leaned swiftly toward him. And as she leaned she saw the interlacing fingers grind together. A tremor shook her that was half fear and half delight.

"I suppose," he began at last, "that you have watched the sun glinting in Vincent's yellow hair?"

"Of course," she said.

"And your fingers have touched it where the sun has fallen?"

"That," she said, "is a secret."

"I am quite sure I have no use for Vincent," he said.

In the pause, the wind went rushing past them and ran on through the far-off treetops, whispering and muttering.

"And I suppose," he went on, "that you could not begin to count the moments you have spent looking into Vincent's wide, blue eyes?"

"I am sure that would be hard to reckon," she said gravely.

"I think I could hate Vincent," he mused. "Do you like him a great deal?"

"I'm sure I dislike confessionals."

"It is rather hard," he said at last.

"What is hard?"

"To play against fate, and to come into the play with the stage set against me."

"I don't understand!"

But watching those gripping fingers she did understand, and the shaking of the fountain counted out the waiting seconds until he spoken again.

"It would have been so easy in any other setting," he said. "For instance, I might have seen you first at a teatable, saying the silly things that go with tea."

"I hate tea," she said fervently.

"Or I might have seen you at the end of a long ride instead of the beginning. I might have seen you with your hair tumbling roughly and your hat askew, and your figure slumping wearily at

every stride of the horse. You would not have mattered then, very much.

She looked up to the moon, but it seemed too bright, too searching, and she dropped her eyes hastily to his hands.

"But even as it was," he said, "I could have stood out against you if it had not been for the spray of autumn leaves at your breast." He nodded solemnly. "That did the harm. It was hardly fair, do you think?"

"They were only autumn leaves," she said, "and anyway I don't understand why you are so solemn."

"That is fibbing," he remarked unemotionally, "and it is not even a white fib. You know perfectly well that the stage was set, and that I had not a chance when I came blundering onto the boards, a mere supernumerary in the last act. Knowing all this, why did you send me the note? I don't like bear-baiting when I am the bear."

She looked away from him into the shadows of the shrubbery. Then, almost desperately:

"Is this mere neighborliness, John Ovington! Can a man meet a girl once and then talk as you are talking?"

"Does it seem impossible to you, Beatrice?" he muttered. "Does it really seem so strange to you? Tell me frankly."

"I don't know," her lips framed the words without sound.

"Your face is so in the shadow," she said in a very low voice, "that I cannot tell whether or not you are smiling to yourself."

"I don't dare to look up to you for fear that you would understand too clearly. But tell me truly, why did you write that note?"

"I cannot tell. I sat down before a piece of paper and the words came of themselves. I don't know what I wrote. I am sorry if I hurt you."

"And I cannot tell why I came here tonight," he answered, "for I was determined to stay away, but my steps guided themselves. Here I am. It is not you or I who speak here tonight, Beatrice, but old forces greater than we. We are puppets in the game, guests of chance. Do you not feel it?"

"I cannot say," she said, "but everything seems changed. It is as if I knew you for a long time. When you speak, I remember your words from long ago. And my heart is cold and strange. I wish you would go, John Ovington. I am afraid of you."

"I cannot go yet," he answered bitterly, "for I sit here and see as plainly as if I were looking at you, the stir of your breast, and the

moonlight white and cold along your throat, and the unconscious smiling of your lips, and the unsearchable shadows of your eyes."

He turned to her fiercely and his left hand gripped the back of the stone seat as he leaned over her.

"Can't you make them clear and plain and readable? Can't you make me feel that I have no hope? That you are completely lost to me? That I have no share in your soul? Why do you torment me with this damnable ghost of hope, Beatrice?"

She made no answer to the compelling whisper, but through a long moment she met his eyes and into the silence once more the shaking of the fountain beat like a pulse. Then she shrank a little away with a musical tremor of sound, and her hand fell palm up across her eyes. He drew her to him, in a moment made rich by the soft warmth of her body.

His lips touched her throat. A sob formed there. He kissed the tremulous hollow of her hand. At once it fell away helplessly. He crushed the parted lips. At once her breath came brokenly and moaning to his ear, and while the thunder of his heart shook both their spirits, she whispered:

"God help me! God help me!"

Thereat he rose suddenly and turned away with bowed head, for at the moan of her voice the thought of the yellow, rustling papers of the cedar box came upon him like a drift of the last leaves of dead autumn. Then he knew that she was clinging to him.

"It is not ended yet," she was saying. "If we are the guests of chance now, oh, be strong and become the master of it all! Find out the way. There is always one road home. John, I trust in you."

When he was able to raise his head she was gone, and a mist that drew across the moon made all the place gray and cold.

He reached his house again and stood a long time before the picture of John Ovington until it seemed that the hard half sneer of the pictured smile was meant for him, and when he slept that night the mockery of it haunted him.

But when he rose the next morning and looked over the shimmer of color running on the hills, a new hope swelled in him and a confidence of power. But as the day drew on the thought of the papers in the cedar box depressed him.

In the middle of the afternoon Hillton brought him a letter. Once more he knew the contents before he broke the seal. As he read the expected words a sick feeling of suspense came over him.

"Vincent Colvin has been with me all this morning. I am going to ride away with him tonight. I have not forgotten, but I promised myself to him long ago, and now I shall keep the promise. My father objects, so we are going out for a ride from which we shall never come back. We will take the Newbury Road. Oh, my dear, it breaks my heart to ride out of your life! It has all been so strange, so maddeningly dear and painful. Must this be good-by?"

Once the letter was finished the suspense left him. Automatically, he ordered his trunk packed and arranged his affairs as if he were about to go on a long journey. At sunset he went for the last time to look at the picture of the other John Ovington.

After that he rode the black horse down the Newbury Road. He hardly knew what position to take, but when he came to a branching of the road the black horse of his own accord drew down to a walk. He had ridden him under the black shadow of an oak by the roadside before he remembered Hillton's story:

"And John Ovington waited for them at a forking of the Newbury Road."

He would have ridden out and found some other waiting-place as he remembered, but a grim determination came up in him and he sat his horse motionless. He remained there for perhaps an hour. The moon came up and ran white along the road. Then a clatter of hoofs beat far away.

They came riding together around the last turn. Colvin was first, a large man riding strongly on a gray horse. They were only a few yards away when Ovington rode out from beneath the tree, his hand raised.

Colvin brought his horse to a stop on grinding hoofs.

"Who the devil are you, sir?" he shouted. "What do you mean by stopping me?"

"I haven't the least wish to stop you," said Ovington calmly, "but I intend to stop Beatrice Jervan tonight. As for you, you may ride to hell, for all of me."

He could see Colvin's face set with fury.

"What authority have you for this?" he demanded.

"The authority of good sense," smiled Ovington, "which says that it is both too late and too cold for a girl to be out riding."

"Damn your impertinence," cried Colvin. "Get out of the road or I'll ride you down."

"Ah," said Ovington, "you talk well, Colvin. But there is an older

score to settle between us than you dream of. You must ride this way alone tonight."

"You fool," shouted Colvin, "if you must have it, take it!"

As he spoke a revolver flashed in his hand, but as it dropped to the level Ovington spurred his black suddenly forward.

With his left hand he struck up Colvin's arm, and the revolver roared past his ear. With his right arm he seized Colvin about the waist and drew him bodily from the saddle.

As he swayed a moment, struggling on the saddle-bow, Ovington swung his right hand free and struck. The blow fell behind Colvin's ear and he collapsed without a sound.

Ovington flung his limp body to the ground.

"You have killed him!" whispered Beatrice.

"He's merely stunned," said Ovington. "Turn your horse. We ride another way this night."

She reined her horse away and raised her riding-crop.

"Keep away," she cried in a choked voice. "Keep away. He has my promise—I shall not leave him!"

He laughed short and hard.

"Promise?" he said. "Do you think that words will stop me tonight after I have conquered destiny at last? Do you dream that words will stop me?"

As he spoke he rode upon her. The riding-crop fell upon his shoulder, but he did not notice it. He swept her from the saddle into his arms and crushed the parted lips fiercely against his own.

"Dearest," he said, "after four generations, I have returned for you and won you away from fate."

Suddenly her straining body gave to him; he heard a murmuring and changed voice at his ear:

"Ride! Ride! He is stirring on the road. He is awakening!"

As they spurred up the road, he turned his head and saw Colvin's gray horse and her brown fleeing side by side far away with loose, shaken bridle-reins and empty saddles.

The virtue and the strength of Robert Arthur as a writer is his stubborn reluctance to conform to the beaten path. Unconventionality of approach and treatment of dramatic incidents has, beyond doubt, contributed to the success of his Mutual System weekly feature "The Mysterious Traveler" of which he is co-author and co-producer. "The Flying Eye" is a "different" story. A true fantasy, yet beautifully limned with undertones of reality to lend credence to that which may not be believed nor disbelieved entirely. Which isn't a bad definition of a good fantasy, now that we think of it.

The Flying Eye

By Robert Arthur

I will say this for Byam—his stock of cameras and accessories can't be duplicated for completeness this side of the Atlantic.

The only trouble with Byam is that he's apt to be a little too pleased with himself. Sometimes he rubs people the wrong way. I know that I've been tempted more than once to quit going to him. But he has a Swiss in his repair shop who can turn out a lens, a shutter, or a whole assembly to suit the most fantastically special requirements of the hardest bitten camera bug, and in the end I always go back.

I was there one morning outlining what I needed for some micro-photography work I was planning when the little man with the broken Reflex wandered in.

Now, if there's one thing in which I take some pride it's the fact that I'm a judge of people. All my life I could look at a man's eyes and know if he's a wrong one, which is often a handy trick. But this little fellow with the battered camera crossed me.

I sized him up as an itinerant freelance, traveling any place fancy took him, exposing on anything that he thought had sales possibility, stopping now and then to unpack his kit and develop what he had

taken, run off prints, and send them in to the big agencies. It's not easy work, but some men make a living at it. And this one had a traveled look to him.

He was a smallish man, with sandy hair going gray, and blue eyes that gleamed behind thick lenses. He was tanned, as if he had traveled a lot in the tropics; he was dressed well enough but as if he didn't bother much about his clothes.

It was lunch hour, and the place was deserted. Byam's two clerks were out eating, and Byam and I, business done, were merely chatting in the little lounge at the rear where old customers congregate. So Byam waited on him.

It turned out that the shutter of the Reflex was broken. The little man was in a hurry—taking a boat that sailed that afternoon, he said. Byam promised him his camera back in forty-five minutes, shot it in to the Swiss, and invited him to wait. Then he came back to our conversation.

The customer wandered around for a few minutes, inspecting Byam's stock; then he drifted back to the lounge, sat down, took a cigarette.

"A nice stock," he complimented Byam. "As complete as a man could wish, almost."

"Almost?" Byam was a little irritated. He prides himself on his completeness. "There isn't a camera or a lens a man could want that I can't produce for you!"

The little man lit his cigarette, and through the first puff of smoke I saw him grin a bit twistedly.

"Wish I could believe you," he answered.

Byam, who is portly, bristled like a stout bulldog. "You can believe me!" he insisted. "Name the camera you want. I'll either produce it, or—"

The stranger shook his head.

"Afraid you couldn't," he said, his voice quiet. "There was only one ever made of the kind of camera I have in mind."

"Oh, well!" Byam shrugged. "In that case! But tell me what it would do, and I'll bet you the cost of your repair job I can show you something as good or better!"

The other shrugged. "I'll be glad to tell you what it would do," he agreed. "Though unless I tell you the whole story, you'll probably doubt me, and you may anyway. You see, it was really rather an interesting type of candid camera that my friend Copernicus Jones made, some years ago."

"Jones?" Byam frowned. "Don't know him. Is he a professional?"

Professional? (The little man shook his head.) No, when he made his camera, Jones was strictly an amateur—a dub. He was the kind of man who sometimes seems to have been born solely to be an amateur at everything. He was no good at games, no good at sports, had no business sense, and was years even learning to drive a car properly.

He would have liked, I suspect, to be an artist, but since he had no ability, that was out, too.

He was a small man—about my size—with a cheerful smile and a happy disposition, and since he had a small income to live on I don't think he would have minded his own ineptness if he hadn't been quite sure it made it impossible for him ever to do the one thing he really wanted to do—marry Mary Bannon.

Mary Bannon was a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl whom he had been fascinated by—from afar—while in high school. He had remembered her for four years during which she had been away, working in New York, and he had learned to worship her in two years since she had returned to live with her parents again.

I don't know whether there was any particular reason *why* he loved her, as he did, dumbly, adoringly, and hopelessly. But he did. Even in those high school days. And more so than ever after her return.

As a girl she had been vivacious, but bad-tempered, unmanageable, and much too fond of expensive things. But after she came back, to live very quietly with her parents, she was quite different. She was a woman then, composed, thoughtful, mature. And—at least Copernicus Jones thought so—more unattainable than ever.

You see, his ineptness at things had given him a bad inferiority complex. And though for almost two years he had been calling on Mary Bannon every Saturday night, in all that time he had never dared tell her what he felt for fear she might laugh.

It never occurred to him that after her return she had gradually discouraged all her old friends from coming to see her, except himself. If you had told him that she was really very fond of him for his earnestness and sincerity and friendliness, he would probably not have believed you.

As a matter of fact, because of her new quietness and a look almost of fear and hopelessness that sometimes came into her eyes when she was off-guard, he had developed a theory that she was still in love

with some man she had known in her absence. The affair, he guessed, had turned out badly, and that was why she tried to avoid talking about those years in the city.

He looked upon himself as someone who helped her to forget; he could not believe that she might take him seriously. But it occurred to him that if he could only shine at something, if he could only draw attention to himself, things might be different. Then, perhaps, she would look at him with new eyes.

That was how he came to take up astronomy and—typically—ended up by making his rather unusual candid camera.

He had read an article, you see, about amateur astronomers, one or two of whom had made a stir in scientific circles by their discovery of comets and other stellar bodies. And he reasoned that if they could achieve renown in such a way, so could he.

So, with great enthusiasm, he set out to become an amateur astronomer, and to do the thing right, he was going to make his own telescope, as the others had done.

He started out by grinding the lens at home, in his basement. There was nothing mysterious about it. He made it from a blank bought by mail from a New York firm, and ground it according to instructions in a book loaned him by a professor of astronomy, at the local university.

This fellow also loaned him most of the necessary tools, and told him to bring the lens in for inspection when it was finished. Copernicus Jones worked away faithfully for weeks putting in every free evening. He followed instructions exactly—at least, so he thought—using the polishing rouge and the other paraphernalia with vigor.

His delicate labor went on uneventfully, except for one small, queer incident. Late one night Jones was holding the lens up to the light, when suddenly he felt a sort of shock in his hand, almost like electricity, and he nearly dropped his lens. Then, examining it again, he noted a peculiar bright spot in it, which seemed to have the outline of a tiny star. That worried Jones for a while, but the next day he could not see the starlike blemish, and so he decided it was not serious or permanent.

He finished the lens at last and promptly trotted over to show it to his professor friend. That gentleman had a hard time suppressing his amusement at the peculiarly curved glass object the little man brought in. But the amusement gave way to amazement after he had put the lens to various tests.

Somehow, in a way not even known to himself, Copernicus Jones had managed to grind that blank into a camera lens. Not exactly a good camera lens, but one that ought to work somehow.

The professor wanted to soften the blow, so he suggested tactfully that Jones might go ahead and try to build a camera for the lens. It was rather an odd lens, he said, and it would probably distort a bit, but it ought to be tremendously fast.

Jones took him at his word. He plunged into photography as enthusiastically as he had into astronomy. He sent away for books, a case full of assorted chemicals, developing pans, red bulbs, printing frames, enlargers, and whatnot, and in order to familiarize himself with technique he bought a good fast camera to work with while building his own.

He learned all the essentials of developing and printing his own pictures, and to his surprise and delight, found himself with an aptitude for the work he had never shown in any other endeavor.

Meanwhile, his camera was coming along. With such a lens as it had, it was, of course, quite unlike any other camera the world has ever seen. Jones figured out what kind of a box he would need, and began building it himself.

He got the lens mounting and a shutter built to order, his friend, the professor, helping him to specify what he wanted. When they came, he put the whole affair together.

The final result was a camera that certainly compared well in size and bulk to anything the fathers of photography ever produced. It was hardly smaller than a portrait camera, and just as hard to lug around. More than that, it was necessarily a plate affair. But it was finished, and Copernicus Jones was as proud of it as a father of his first child.

However, he didn't want to show it to his friend until he knew it would work. So he promptly laid in a store of plates and went out the next morning on a snapping spree.

It was cumbersome work, but in three hours he managed to expose a dozen plates, using different lights and speeds in order to get an idea of the camera's capabilities. Then he rushed back to develop what he had.

The result was disappointing. In fact, almost crushing.

He had snapped the usual amateur's subject—a grazing horse, a small child at play, a field of daisies, things like that. But none of them had come out. One plate showed a vague, misty image of a child, incredibly under-exposed. On another there was a ghostly sort of

blur that might have been a horse racing by at high speed. The rest were as blank as if they had never been exposed.

Copernicus Jones was not a man to be dejected long. He had been taking pictures at candid-camera speeds. He went out again, late in the afternoon, and tried half a dozen more plates, using time exposures. That evening he eagerly turned to his developing tins.

The result—more disappointment. The plates were as empty as the first one had been.

Jones lay awake that night, puzzling over his failure. It was either his lens or his plates. The lens was transmitting something, however, that was certain. But no matter how much time he gave it, the image failed to register. It might be that the plates were not adapted to his lens. He would try making his own.

He already had most of the chemicals needed, except for a few special ones that the local drug store procured after a few days' delay. Cleaning off the dozen plates he had—he'd managed to break six, developing them—Jones set about getting a super-super-speed emulsion on them the moment the chemicals arrived. The task proved difficult, but by evening he had coated the twelve plates.

The next day, to his disappointment, turned out to be a blustery, raw November day, with a dull gray light pervading everything and no trace of sunshine anywhere.

Nevertheless, he was going to take pictures. Putting aside six plates for exposure the next time the light was fine, he slung his awkward box around his neck and trotted out, early in the afternoon.

The first picture he took was of Patrolman Grogan, the traffic cop on duty at the main downtown intersection. Grogan was a roly-poly man with a round, red face, always placid and good-natured. No one had ever known him to lose his temper, even when he had to give a ticket, which was rarely.

Standing on the corner, Copernicus Jones got a shot that ought to make a swell character study if it came out, then wandered onward.

Presently he came upon a baby carriage on the pavement outside a store. In the carriage, waiting while its mother shopped, was a young baby with a round, inquiring face and large, blue eyes that stared at the passing world wonderingly. Babies always made good subjects. Delightedly Copernicus Jones snapped it, while the baby eyed him with absorbed attention.

The little man continued his search for good camera subjects. He had wandered out toward the edge of town, and was beginning to

regret not having worn a heavy coat, when a bit of landscape attracted his eye.

Underneath an ancient elm almost denuded by the autumn winds, a forlorn old hound was sitting, ears hanging down, eyes rheumy. Beside him, about the trunk of the tree, a tangle of thorny branches that had been a rosebush crawled, a few withered leaves and shriveled seed pods still clinging to them.

The sheer melancholy of the scene was inescapable. Backing off until he could get it all, Copernicus Jones exposed the third plate.

He was being very choosy of the subjects he used up his plates on, but a few minutes later ran across one he couldn't resist.

Ahead of him, a small boy came out of a bookstore and paused on the street corner. He had a book in his hands, and it was open. Absently the youngster stretched out a leg to step down into the street, turning a page as he did so. And then, reading eagerly, he stood there like that, completely lost to this world in his absorption in the one that lay on the printed pages before him.

Copernicus Jones caught a glimpse of the title of the book and grinned. "The Lost Man." He had been like that boy himself. He knew the wonder and delight the youngster was experiencing now. Jones made his fourth take a portrait study of the boy reading.

Then, as he put the plate in his holder, he became aware that he had dawdled away a lot of time. The day was waning, the light fading. The gray of evening was dropping over the town like a widow's veils. He had no time left in which to be choosy. So he clicked the shutter again, almost at random, on a tall, lean stranger who came hurrying down the street like a man late for an important rendezvous.

The man's face was half-concealed in his upturned coat collar, but as he strode past there was something so hunted and haggard in his eyes that Copernicus Jones shivered a little, uneasily, with something more than the cold.

The incident dashed his enthusiasm for taking more pictures that day. Besides, it was Saturday, and Saturday evenings he was always expected for dinner at the Bannon home. Thither he hurried now.

This evening followed the usual pattern of his dates with Mary Bannon. After dinner, because she did not feel like going to the movies, they sat in the living room, listening to the radio, and talking. He showed her a handful of snapshots—really very good—which he had taken with the camera he had bought, and told her about making the one that lay outside in the hall.

Mary Bannon sat, mostly in silence, and listened, smiling affec-

tionately, occasionally interrupting to ask a question that showed she was really interested. For Jones the time passed all too swiftly, as it always did when he was with her.

He said good night at last with his usual bashfulness, and as Mary Bannon stood in the doorway smiling after him, the overhead light putting a halo effect into her hair, he knew how he was going to use his last plate. He focused his camera swiftly, and snapped her as she stood there.

Then with a final wave of his hand he scuttled on homeward.

He was dog-tired and had a headache. All evening he had felt a cold coming on. But in spite of his weariness he descended to his dark-room and set about developing what he had taken. The plates had to be done individually, and handled as carefully as so much radium, so two was all he could manage before he felt the hot and cold waves of fever and chills sweeping over him.

Manfully he held out long enough to inspect the two plates. But when he put them into his enlarging projector and flashed a positive of them on the screen, he knew he was a lot sicker than he had guessed. So sick, in fact, he was having hallucinations.

The first plate, which should have shown Officer Grogan directing traffic, showed nothing like that. Grogan was in it, yes. But a completely unrecognizable Grogan. The one in the picture had somehow grown to be six feet tall, and added half a dozen inches to his chest development. And he was engaged in about as fine a knockdown and dragout brawl as ever a bluecoat got into.

Around his feet were sprawled no less than five limp, unconscious ruffians, their jaws sagging, their eyes glazed, their noses bloody. Officer Grogan was just planting a burly fist into the unshaven countenance of a sixth, lifting him half a dozen inches in the air and sending flying a gun in his hand. And Grogan, as he delivered the blow, wore a beatific smile of pleasure.

Dazedly, Jones thrust into the projector the second plate, which should show a baby in its carriage. But it didn't. In fact, there wasn't even a baby in it.

What it did show, as far as Copernicus Jones could make out, was a double exposure of a man from Mars. Against a background of vaguely seen shop fronts a creature eighteen feet tall loomed. From a shadowy body of which no details could be made out, its great bulbous head rose on a long, spindly neck. And it was looking downward out of huge, round, shining eyes that projected from a flat face.

The face lacked a nose, but it had a great gaping mouth in which long white teeth glistened savagely.

Copernicus Jones groaned, and put an icy hand to his throbbing head. There was something wrong again, and this time he was sure it was with him. His brain was playing tricks on him. He staggered upstairs and fell into bed, as weak as a puppy.

Next morning, he woke with a severe case of grippe, and a high fever. His housekeeper called a doctor, and an hour later Jones found himself in a hospital, far too miserable to worry about his new camera or the strange negatives it had produced.

Mary Bannon came to see him, and she showed such anxiety about him that the little man was almost glad he'd gotten sick. He was almost tempted to stay in bed just so she'd keep on coming to see him. But as his strength returned, an itch to see those plates again took possession of him.

Over his doctor's advice, he crawled into his clothes on the seventh day and took a taxi home. He was still weak, but his head was clear, and as he entered his dark-room he knew that whatever he saw now would be no delusion. He was only afraid that he would see nothing.

But he did. Exactly what he had seen before. Two fantastic negatives, like a madman's dreams, which had gotten onto his plates by some process too bewildering to comprehend.

Eagerly he took out the other plates, arranged the developing and fixing baths, and one by one put them through it. The shot of the old dog under the barren tree was the first. With trembling fingers he put it into his projector and threw it on the screen.

This time the scene was recognizable, though changed in every detail. There was a dog in it, a tree, and a rosebush. Copernicus Jones stared at the projection in open-mouthed wonder and delight.

Instead of a rheumy-eyed old hound, the picture showed a great dog with long glossy hair, bounding up from the ground as a rabbit scuttled by beneath his nose. There had been, as Jones knew well, no rabbit when he snapped the picture.

The maple in the background was a towering tree fully leaved, and golden shafts of sunlight were arrowing through the foliage to throw a mottled light on a rosebush at its base—a rosebush heavy-laden with open blossoms that nodded in the sunshine.

Every detail was sharp and clear. The whole composition breathed of summer, of Nature in all her vigor and splendor. Jones knew he

might have shot for a lifetime and never taken a picture as magnificent as that.

And—that was what bothered him—he knew that he hadn't taken this one!

Feverishly he hurried the remaining plates through, and one by one projected them. The fourth plate was quite as inexplicable as any of the others.

It held one recognizable object—the Egyptian Sphinx, time-worn, as he had seen it many times in books and magazines. Piled high about the stone figure were vast bergs of ice, glittering with a pale, cold light in the rays from an incredibly tiny sun. And at the foot of the Sphinx, beneath the ice cliffs that threatened at any moment to crash inward, a man wearing furs was battling with a two-pronged spear against a six-legged, lizard-like creature a dozen feet in length.

Copernicus Jones gulped, and gave a little groan. But the fifth plate reduce him to horrified silence.

It portrayed a man hanging by the neck from the rafters of a barn. The knot of the rope pressed into his flesh behind his ear. His face was turned away, as if for a last glance at the dark forms that crouched in the shadowy corners of the barn.

They were—and Copernicus Jones was thankful—vague, scarcely distinguishable figures. Dark faces grimaced at the hanging man as if in baffled fury. Snake-like bodies writhed about each other in tortured coils, and from them many-fingered hands reached out, as if in vain efforts to grasp the man now beyond their reach. The whole might have been a scene from Dante, showing a man driven to his death by the dark fancies of his own tortured brain.

And then Copernicus Jones snapped off his projector light and sat up straight and rigid. Realization and understanding had come to him. He had the answer—the only possible answer. Now he knew what had happened. His camera hadn't caught the physical images of his subjects.

Instead, it had captured pictures of their thoughts!

In some manner Jones had constructed the most candid camera ever made. Instead of merely catching its subjects off-guard, it actually made a visual record of what they were thinking, or at least of the image in their minds at the time.

Don't ask me to explain it. Some unimaginable freak of curvature that Jones put into the lens by mistake, some unplotted curve, perhaps, that produced a fourth-dimensional focus for the faint lines of force

emanating from the human brain may have been responsible. There's no way to know.

But a little pondering told Jones that he had the true answer. That picture of Officer Grogan staging a battle royal with a gang of thugs, for instance. Now, thinking, Jones recalled something very like that in a recent movie he had seen starring James Cagney. Undoubtedly Grogan had seen it. And his camera had surprised Grogan in the midst of a daydream, in which he had been playing the part of a hero in a way he could never hope to in life.

The little man chuckled. And his grin grew broader as he inspected the picture of the "Martian." Looking closely now, he could recognize it. It was no one but himself, as seen through the eyes of a baby.

A baby, he recalled reading, had to learn to see almost as it had to learn to walk. Its vision was both unfocused and unable to grasp perspective. And it was perspective, of course, that enabled one to know the relative sizes of near and distant figures.

To the infant, Jones, bending above it and clucking to keep it interested, had seemed a giant's size, his horn-rim glasses vast glittering eyes, his open mouth a fanged cavern. And of course, since its gaze had been fixed on his face, his body and all other details had been mere shadowy blurs. Talk about seeing yourself as others saw you! He'd done it!

Still smiling, Jones took up the third plate. And then a flush of excitement tinged his cheek. His head began to reel a little as full realization of what he had done came to him. He had an instrument that could record the hidden thoughts, the impressions, the fears, the hopes, the memories of men. But more than that, it could interpret the thoughts of the lower animals, even the half-aware dreams of the trees in the forest and the lilies in the fields!

The third plate proved that—the one showing the dog leaping after the rabbit, the tree in full leaf, the rosebush in bloom.

The old dog, it was evident, had been remembering himself in the vigor of his youth, hunting rabbits on a summer day. The maple, almost dormant with its winter sleep, had had some mysterious consciousness of spring to come, when it would leaf again. And the rosebush likewise had had its own knowledge, on what level the human mind cannot know, that one day it would bloom again in warmth and sunshine.

And all these things the lens had caught.

For long moments Jones was lost in awed contemplation of the

vistas he had opened to human knowledge. Then he went on to examine the fourth and fifth prints again.

The fourth, fantastic as the scene it represented was—the battle between man and monster in the shadow of crumbling ice cliffs—he wasted little time over. It was a picture of the end of the world, as visualized by a novelist and imagined by the small boy who had been reading his book with such absorption on the street corner that day. But the fifth held his attention for several minutes.

It was the picture of a suicide, that had not yet taken place. But he recalled the haunted face of the man who had hurried past him on the street, and knew that his camera had caught the vision of death in the man's tortured mind—death to escape the twisting, unreal creatures of his own fancies, always pursuing him, always reaching out for him, until they drove him to the final refuge of the rope dropped from the dusty rafter.

Soberly, Copernicus Jones put the plate aside, a little shaken by the realization to what dark depths his camera could plumb and make plain. And then it came to him, belatedly, that he had not yet looked at what was to him the most important negative of all—the one he had taken of Mary Bannon as she stood in the doorway saying good-night to him.

Hurriedly he corrected the omission. And when he saw the result, he gave a whoop of incredulous joy.

In actuality, he and Mary had merely said good-night to each other, for he had never dared to try to kiss her. But the photograph showed him holding her firmly and masterfully in his arms as he bestowed a properly satisfactory kiss on her lips.

The meaning was plain. Though he hadn't done so, she had wanted him to kiss her. She did love him, and probably he would have known it long ago if it had not been for his own shyness.

In his excitement, he forgot the other pictures he had taken, forgot the camera, forgot its possibilities and all the plans for using it that had begun to form in his mind. Pausing only to grab up a hat, he ran as fast as his still shaky legs would carry him to Mary Bannon's home.

There he startled her by grabbing her in his arms, kissing her as warmly as he had been doing in the photograph, and asking her to marry him. She looked bewildered, and hesitated. But he was so happy and excited and insistent that after a moment she gave in and agreed. She would marry him.

And then, just as he was going to pour out to her the story of his

camera and the way in which it had brought them together now, he keeled over in a relapse.

This time, thanks to his previous premature departure, he stayed in the hospital a good two weeks. And in that time he had plenty of chance to think.

His thoughts were equally divided between his camera and Mary Bannon—who, really, had inspired its construction. The more he considered, the more possibilities he discovered in the camera.

For instance, no man could even guess what marvels it might open to the naturalist and biologist who used it to investigate the thoughts and sensations of lower life forms. Man's understanding of the natural universe might well be revolutionized by such discoveries.

And what might it not reveal to the psychologists who could probe with it into the dark corners of unhappy minds, and find there perhaps the causes of insanity, and their antidote!

It could be put to practical uses too. It might be employed in criminal trials, to find the truth locked within a defendant's skull. It could, perhaps, be made into a powerful, secret weapon by the nation itself. Suppose a man armed with the camera were to picture the rulers, the scientists, the generals of an unfriendly foreign power. Inevitably he would gain information of the utmost value—information that might well mean peace or war for the whole world.

Copernicus Jones' head reeled a little, as he contemplated all the ways in which his camera might be used.

It was clear to him that its powers might easily be abused and turned to ugly, evil purposes. He had meant to make the facts about it public, to invite the government or a committee of famous scientists to test it thoroughly. But now he realized that this might not be the wisest course. It might be stolen or damaged. It would be better to keep his own secret, for a while at least.

So he did not even tell Mary. He planned to tell her only after they were married—which would be the day that he was able to leave the hospital. Then he would outline its capabilities to her, and ask her advice. He had great confidence in her judgment and common sense.

So it was not until several weeks later, when they had become thoroughly settled in their new home, a comfortable old farmhouse that he had bought just outside the town, that he confided his secret to her.

The only thing he had done with the camera in those weeks was to use up the six spare plates he had, picturing his wife in different moods, some gay, some pensive, some silent and abstracted. His inten-

tion was to develop them before he explained about the camera to her. Then, by showing her how it had captured her thoughts, he could more easily make clear just what it did.

Very gaily, the evening he had taken the last of the six, he went down to his darkroom and set about the delicate task of developing the plates.

He did not try to inspect each one as he finished it, beyond making sure it had developed properly, but laid them to one side until all six were ready. Then he called her.

She came cheerfully, and at his request sat down in the darkroom as he shoved the first slide at hand into the projector and prepared to flash an enlargement on his screen.

"This is a secret I've kept from you," he told her lightly. "It'll probably make me famous, if I ever tell anybody else. That would be funny, wouldn't it—John Copernicus Jones, the dub, becoming famous!"

"What this is is an all-seeing eye that will look right into your mind and take pictures of what it finds there. With it I can know whether you love me or not, and whether we're going to have roast beef or pork chops for supper. I can know what you want for Christmas, and what color you've decided your next dress is going to be. I—"

Then, as she stared at him, questioningly, not yet understanding, he pressed the switch and flashed the first plate onto the screen.

His wife uttered a little cry and then sat quite still. For a moment Jones found himself held as if by a paralysis. Then he shut off the light, wiping the damnable picture from the screen, snatched the plate out, and smashed it on the floor. The other five he flung down and shattered after it.

But it was too late. They both had seen that one picture—one he must have taken in a moment of silence and abstraction such as occasionally seized her, when certain memories persisted in forcing themselves back into her mind.

Mary sat for seconds immobile. Then at last she rose.

"It's true," she said in a whisper he could barely hear. "That did happen to me. I meant for you never to know. Because I wanted you to be happy. I did so want you to be happy, because I loved you. I thought it was safe to marry you. I thought I could keep the secret.

"But now you know, and you won't be able to be happy now. Not like we would have been. Because you'll never be able to forget what you just saw. It was in the past, dead, but you've dug it up again and

brought it to life. Now it'll always be there between us. We couldn't be the same again, ever."

Then she went out. She went upstairs and packed a bag. And because he was so stunned at what the plate had revealed, he did not try to stop her. The next morning he discovered that she had vanished, leaving no word behind her as to where she meant to go.

It was not until several days had passed, and the shock had worn away, that he began to realize he had been wrong to let her leave. She need not have gone. They could have kept the past buried, not let it come between them. Frantically, he was sure of it. And though her trail was cold and lost by now—as she evidently had intended it to be—he set out to find her if he could.

Before he went, he descended to the darkroom and unscrewed the lens from his unique camera. Then he dashed it onto the concrete floor. It shattered into a thousand fragments of crystal. They were gleaming there like a thousand mocking eyes when he turned and hurried out.

The little customer paused, caught his breath, and rose when a stock boy came in with his repaired camera.

"Nice job," he commented to Byam, taking it and looking it over. "What do I owe you?"

"Nothing," Byam answered impatiently. "But what—"

The travel-marked free-lance tucked his Reflex under his arm.

"What was it she had been remembering that the slide caught and betrayed?" There was a crooked smile on the man's face. "Does it matter? Though there's no reason you shouldn't know. The picture Jones saw on the screen was of a pair of woman's hands—hands clenching steel bars. He saw clearly the ring on one hand, and he recognized it, for it belonged to Mary.

"You remember that I told you her character changed in those years she was away; that she changed from a giddy girl into a quiet, mature woman. The change was the result, I guess, of the ugly thing that happened to her.

"It was a sordid thing, and I need not describe it in detail. The man concerned was infinitely more to blame than Mary—but he let her stand alone, and she was convicted, she served two years in prison. The man—went his way.

"When she was released after those two years she went back to her home town. And found herself presently in love with the shy, unassuming, simple little man, Copernicus Jones.

"She really loved him, and she married him because she thought the secret was safely dead and buried in the past. She believed that if he were to know it, it would affect him too powerfully for him ever to be happy as she wanted him to be happy.

"It would, as she had said, always be between them. Perhaps she was wrong. But at least she had the strength to act on her convictions. What he always remembered of her was that she had loved him, and would have made him happy if he had let her.

"So"—Byam's customer had been gradually moving toward the door as he spoke—"on second thought, perhaps it's just as well you don't have a lens in the shop which will do what Copernicus Jones' would. For our own good, there are some doors we shouldn't unlock."

Then he nodded, waved his hand in farewell, and started out to the crowded street. Byam started forward, stretching out an arm as if to detain him.

"Wait!" Byam called. "Are you— Tell us, did he ever find her again?"

The voice answering was weary and yet it held a curious note of hope. "He has not found her yet," it said. "But he will. He will find her."



Wherever I Look . . .

I had been married two years to the girl I met in the Marine Hospital in Hawaii when a wonderful thing happened. I guess it really started when I knew finally and deep inside that our marriage was going to work. No matter what room I walked into, I could look at the wall and see a picture of my wife. At restaurants, she was always in a frame on the wall smiling back at me. In the kitchen, at other homes, at the American Legion club room, no matter where, she was always there. It was as if some good fairy was running around ahead of me to place that sweet face where I could always have it with me.

Right now, as I write this, it's on the wall up there, warm and loving and just right. I guess I'm a pretty lucky guy after all. Because I've never seen my wife in my life. I met her after a Jap mortar blinded me on Tarawa.

Corp. Lester Jenks, Chicago, Ill.

The President's Daughter

From the heart of Russia—and an
unconscious girl—a great surgeon
hears a potent warning.

By Anton Kermac

The surgeon's name was Dr. Michael White II, and he practiced at New York's finest hospital, a chrome and glass building pitched high above the East river. Within its four walls, Doctor White ruled like a modern Tamerlane, with science as his god and surgery his love. Dr. Mike, as the nurses no longer called him, had not laughed for many years, nor had his erect figure unbent except so far as was needful in his operating theatre.

In his glossy apartment on West End Avenue, it was much the same. He ruled the servants and the furniture and the doormen much as he ruled his hospital. He ruled all except Elsa White, his wife. Elsa was graying but still beautiful and she had worked at his side for twenty-five years. Elsa made Doctor White remember that he was a man—or had been one before he became a scientific automaton.

This was their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. This day was the one he had selected to tell her that he could not continue living with her. There was no one else, no clandestine lover to make a messy tabloid story. His separation and divorce would be as aseptic as an appendectomy.

From his office window—from the room in which he made decisions which permitted people to live or die—he looked over the great city, observing the human figures in the streets below. During the next twelve months hundreds of them would come through this hospital. He would heal so many, kill so many, write about so many in important journals; it was all figured out scientifically. That would be his life. As for Elsa, she would be comfortable. She could have their apartment or take a smaller one. She would be well fixed. This was his day of telling.

His desk phone buzzed. The operating room said, "We have an emergency, doctor. Please come."

"Ask Doctor McManus to take it," he directed.

"This is a very unusual case," the nurse said. "A—crash . . ."

"Call McManus," he ordered.

The nurse said, "This is the President's daughter."

In the operating room, pulling on his rubber gloves, he studied the girl. She was about twenty-five. Her face was composed and her eyes were closed in trance-like sleep but within her body an awful thing had happened. His assistants administered the pentathol anesthetic that would protect her mind from pain. The task was delicate but, as always, he knew exactly what to do.

After a while, he said, "She's going to be all right."

"Where is the president?" he inquired presently.

"Moscow! They're in conference again," someone said. "He was going to be on the air tonight."

When the President's daughter was wheeled to her room Doctor White accompanied her, impelled by some urge he did not understand. After a long while the girl stirred and her eyes opened. When she began to talk it was in snatches typical of a pentathol reaction. He sat unheeding, intent only on her pulse. It was very fast.

The sound of her voice was like a child. Its timbre was sweet and without guile. She talked of baseball and dancing and musical plays. Suddenly, she lifted herself onto her elbows in an attitude of listening. Poised and confident, her voice deepened, adding maturity and strength until it was almost mannish, forming phrases that made complete sentences with a lift at the end exactly like her father's style of oratory.

"It is not for any man to put himself above another, to envy another, to harm another," she said, spacing the words with care. "We spring from the same womb, we live on the fruits of the same earth, we are equal one to the other, and only when we accept that status are we proper members of the human race."

The doctor searched her face, wondering. "Our family of nations is but an extension of our personal families," she continued earnestly. "We who have lived in love for so many years must continue to have faith in each other. Our friendship must endure or this earth will slip back to dust. Our love for one another is the measure of our very last chance for peace on this earth."

The nurse said, "She talks like her father."

He said, "It's uncanny." As he left the room he noted the clock. It was exactly four o'clock.

By evening, Doctor White could issue a bulletin saying that his distinguished patient was in no danger. Afterwards, he walked home.

The dinner was perfect. Elsa served impeccably as she always did. Their talk was meager and proper, as it had been for a long time. Once, as the finger bowls were served, she dropped a spoon. "Sorry," she said quickly. It was the only flaw in the perfect meal and she knew he hated flaws.

They went to the music room and he felt impelled to turn on the radio although he never did such a thing. "Am I nervous?" he wondered to himself.

The radio said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States, speaking direct from Moscow . . ."

Doctor White listened at first with the professional indifference of a Republican. The President's words marched through his consciousness in their familiar pattern. Suddenly, he leaned forward, intent on each syllable. These words were identical with those he had heard that same afternoon from the unconscious lips of the President's daughter.

"We who have lived in love and amity so many years . . . must continue to have faith in each other." The President's voice was anxious, pleading. "Our love for one another is the measure of our last chance for peace on this earth . . ."

"I'm damned," the doctor exclaimed.

The telephone rang and he left the room to take the call. It was the President in Paris. "How's my girl?" he asked.

"She's in no danger," the doctor said. "She'll be as good as new."

"Did you operate?"

"Yes. A minor one."

"I thought so," the President said. "How did she stand it?"

"Talked and prattled like a baby. Pentathol does that, you know." The surgeon recalled the speech he had just heard. "I'm just through hearing your speech. It was splendid. Showed a lot of thought."

"We went to the studio and I made a recording without notes," the President said. "I finished about four o'clock your time and flew to Paris immediately. Glad it sounded all right."

The doctor heard himself saying, "But that's impossible, Mr. President. Your daughter said those words I just heard on the radio . . . she said them to me this afternoon. She was under the anesthetic and she said the very same words."

"I hoped she would hear me," the President said. "We often talk to each other like that when I'm away from Washington."

"But that's impossible, Mr. President . . ."

The President said, "I won't debate science with you, doctor, but I have found that many things can be accomplished by those who love each other."

When Doctor White returned to the music room, an unwanted confusion possessed him. His world of facts, of absolute truth, or precise logic and inexorable verity was tipping crazily. For the first time in many years, he knew doubt.

"It was the President," he said.

"He is a good man," Elsa replied.

Sitting beside her, looking at her fine face and her strong hands, he remembered the years of their lives, the children she had borne who had died and the children she had borne who had lived and gone on to other lives of their own. Snatches of the girl's talk—the President's talk—came back . . . "Our love is the measure of our last chance . . ."

"I'm afraid," he said, musingly, as one who makes a significant discovery.

"You?" She took his hand in hers. "You've never been afraid in your life."

"But tonight, I'm afraid," he said.

"Maybe we're both afraid," she said.

He faced her. This was the night to tell her. All day he had planned how he would do it. He had anticipated her reaction precisely, calculated her response to a hair's breadth. This was the twenty-fifth anniversary and the night to tell her. She noticed his attitude. "Yes, dear?" she said.

"You've forgotten something about this night," he said.

"What have I forgotten?" she asked.

"Our wedding anniversary," he said. "This is our twenty-fifth."

She said, "You are the one who forgets usually."

He grasped both her hands. The radio was pouring forth a warm melody, rich with strings and deep-voiced saxes. His teetering world straightened up as her serenity flowed into his fingers. "Our love," the President had said, "is the measure of our last chance . . ."

"Madame, may I have this dance?" he said.

She rose with him, her eyes lighted by sudden joy. "I was hoping you would ask, Doctor Mike," she said.

Richard Sale made his first great success as the writer of smoothly zany detective stories and it is but natural that this writing force, projected into logical paths, should carry him into the realms of fantasy, the borders of which had always so obviously tempted him. In "The Benevolent Ghost and Captain Lowrie" you may discover a key to a riddle which has perplexed the ages. Or perchance only a very deft, finely-wrought tale of the shadowy unreal.

The Benevolent Ghost and Captain Lowrie

By Richard Sale

I

North of them, across the miles of black wet, howling night, Cape Town reposed upon the sturdy rocks of Africa, feeling the storm, too, but not the shock of the ocean.

The *S.S. Mary Watson*, Baltimore, Maryland, was an old ship. That did not mean she was senile. She had been with the sea a long time and she knew its foibles and handled herself with uncanny dexterity. But she had not been built originally to stand such buffeting, and her age made her joints creak when the heavy seas pounded her.

It was Bruno's watch and he listened to the high crying of the wind as it searched with harsh fingers through every crack and cranny of his clothing. Its pressure lay against his chest and cheeks alike, binding both arms against his chest and making a relentless skirt about his legs. Pushing into the weight of the gale, he fought its thrust as he balanced like a tight-rope walker above the rise and pitch of the restless deck. His heart boomed roughly as the ship smashed forward, expert but weary and old.

It was Bruno's watch, and he did not like it. Only once before, east in the Caribbean Sea, after a sore and foggy dawn, had he seen

a wind with such velocity. They would soon be in trouble, and he knew it, and so called up the old man and put the responsibility where it belonged.

The night was black, yet they could see some of it because the bridge was even blacker. Where the combers burst upon the fore-piece and swept the *Mary Watson's* deck to the beam, there to be spit back into the sea through the scuppers, the water exploded alternately white and green against the tapestry of darkness.

Outside, as Captain John Lowrie soon found, the night was filled with the wind and the ocean, the rain had slackened perceptibly, but the wind hauled southwest the port side, and it nearly blew his teeth into his throat.

He gripped the rail and went up the stairs toward the bridge, catching a glimpse of the *Mary Watson's* lonely funnels staggering overhead in the dark. Forward, he was barely able to discern the bridge wingtips with their glass weatherbreaks. The high howl of the wind on the boat deck smothered the deep thunder of the raging seas alongside as they swept by, white, mad, hungry.

He stepped off the bridge and slammed the door shut behind him, shaking his shoulders, soaking with rain. He stared across the darkness of the bridge at Bruno, and said, "It's a fine night to call a man out."

Bruno said nothing. There was nothing to say. The weather conditions spoke for themselves, and even a seasick landlubber could tell by the way the *Mary Watson* pitched and rolled that all was not well.

Captain Lowrie walked over to the helmsman, who clung to the wheel nervously, his eyes wide as he peered through the rain-studded window. The helmsman's name was Murphy, and he was young. He was nervous because he was having his first taste of a whole gale.

"How does she go, Mister?" asked Captain Lowrie.

"She goes hard and heavy, sir," replied Murphy, his voice flat.

Bruno said, "I've been in communication with Mr. McNulty, sir, in the engine room, and he reports excessive vibration in the shaft. I changed speed to dead slow, but that seemed to make little difference. To my way of thinking we should heave to for the night, until this blows out."

"To my way of thinking, there's little sense in that," said Captain Lowrie. "Change your course, mister. Due southwest, nothing off. Look alive now."

There was thunder in the seas as the helmsman brought her over. Her blunt prow dug in hard and firm, the blows running through her body. The starboard bow vanished under the weighted seas, but in another moment it was clear and she was dead in the wind, pitching and tossing, the sickening rolls now gone.

They could all feel the difference at once. The strain went out of her rusty plates. Her fore and aft motion was short and sharp, as a good pitch should be. Mr. Murphy at the helm relaxed.

"Well, now," said Captain Lowrie, "that was a small thing to get a man out in this kind of night for. How did you expect her to go easy with the waves on her beam?"

Bruno did not mind the jibe. Indeed, Captain Lowrie did not mean for it to be taken seriously. They both knew that the course could be changed only with the captain's permission. And for all the heartiness in Captain Lowrie's voice, there was still a troubled look around his eyes. Bruno noticed it and knew what it meant. For dead in the wind, her blunt bow rebuffing the staggering blows of the giant waves, the *Mary Watson* was safe enough. But there were many things that could happen: a broken screw, a burned-out bearing, or another ship out there in the darkness, unseen. Power was the thing. Without it, they were lost.

Captain Lowrie said, "What does Sparks report?"

"Sparks was in touch with Cape Town half an hour ago, and he reports there ain't a ship within seventy miles of us. The nearest one is the *Nichyo Maru*. She's due west of us, so we've nothing to worry about in the way of a collision."

"It's nice to know," said Captain Lowrie. "A lookout couldn't sight the devil's own seven masters on a night like this."

Bruno shivered. "Aye, sir," he said, "I've seen a night like this only once in fourteen years at sea. And I never want to see another. It's the sort of black dark night when seamen's yarns come true. Mr. Franklin was telling me a while back that he saw St. Elmo's fire on the mast."

Franklin was second officer of the *Mary Watson*.

"St. Elmo's fire!" Captain Lowrie exclaimed. "And what's so mythical about St. Elmo's fire? I've seen it many a time at sea, and not a stormy night needed for it, either. When I was mate of the schooner *Chaff*, fishing the Grand Banks out of Gloucester, a long time ago, I seen St. Elmo's fire time and again. Little crackling flames, sharp and clear, dancing across the yardarms. St. Elmo's fire is no myth."

Murphy at the helm stirred uneasily and opened his mouth. But he shut it again without saying anything.

Captain Lowrie stared at him. "Was you goin' to say something, mister?"

Murphy wet his lips, swallowed hard. "You were talking of seamen's yarns, Captain, and it was just that I was remembering some others I've heard. Tales of the Sargasso, the mystery of the *Marie Celeste*, and of the Flying Dutchman."

"Ah," said Captain Lowrie. "The Dutchman!" He rubbed his hand through his shaggy mustache, and the bristly sound of it filled the bridge. "The Dutchman indeed."

He said it with such fervor that Bruno turned and stared at him. "Surely, sir," he said, "you don't believe them old wives' tales?"

Captain Lowrie did not reply at once. He stared out through the storm window above the faint miserly glow which illumined the compass card, and he locked his hands behind his back and swayed easily with the motion of the freighter.

"Old wives' tales, eh?" He shook his head slowly. "You're young, Mr. Bruno, and maybe that's the reason; but me—I've been a seaman nigh onto twenty-five years, and there's strange things happen in the seas. Strange indeed."

Mr. Murphy swallowed again, so hard this time that he made a clucking sound. There wasn't much light on the bridge, but the little there was showed his face pale and white. The sound of his gulp drew the old man's eyes.

"Feeling seasick, mister?" the captain said.

"No, sir," replied Mr. Murphy. "I was just rememberin'."

"Rememberin' what?"

"I was rememberin', Captain, that we're off the Cape of Good Hope in a blow. And that's just about what happened to the Flying Dutchman, isn't it?"

"Mind the helm!" Mr. Bruno said sharply. He glanced at the quartermaster with some contempt. "You're nervous enough, mister, without getting scared about a ghost."

"Yes sir," Mr. Murphy said.

II

"Aye," Captain Lowrie ruminated soberly. "There's strange things in the sea. You, Mr. Bruno, you don't believe in sea serpents, I take it."

There's more things in heaven and earth and ocean than a man could ever dream about.

"I believe in sea serpents. I believe there is things in the ocean no man has ever seen. Why, bless St. Christopher, it was near this very spot that a trawler hauled a fish out of the sea that was supposed to have been dead for fifty million years. Them scientific fellows have been reconstructing it from fossils they found some place in Europe.

"And right here, near Cape Town, a smelly trawler hauls it topside. Extinct for fifty million years, and yet not dead at all! I tell you, Mr. Bruno, no man knows what's under the sea. And for that matter, no man knows what's above the sea, either. So who's to say the legend of the Flying Dutchman ain't true?"

Bruno sniffed. "Personally, sir, I don't believe in ghosts," he said.

Captain Lowrie snorted gruffly. "And I suppose you don't think it's bad luck to kill an albatross or a gull? I suppose you don't think a ship is a 'she.' I suppose you don't think a shark following in the wake is bad luck. Silly superstitions for old fools like me, eh?"

"I didn't say that, sir."

"What's the difference, man, if you think it?"

Bruno shrugged. Captain Lowrie continued:

"When I was mate aboard the *S.S. Gulf City*—she was a Standard Oil tanker in the coastwise trade—we had two seamen die of ptomaine poisoning. We buried them at sea, somewhere off Hatteras. I'd always heard that yarn about a dead man following the ship he loved, just as easily as a rat deserted a ship that was doomed.

"Next day, the watch spied one of the corpses floating in our wake, right after us. He thought maybe his eyes were tricking him, so he ran to get a camera to take a picture. But when he came back, the corpse was gone. We all joshed him about it.

"Two days later, off the Virginia Cape—now mind you, we buried them off Hatteras—the watch spied both them men floating in our wake! This time he had a camera with him, and he took a picture. He wanted to make sure that he would have something to prove his word, this time.

"But he needn't have been in such a hurry, because this time they didn't disappear. They hung on our wake all day long, and every member of the ship got an eyeful of them. They were there as plain as day; you could even see their faces. From Hatteras to the Virginia Cape, mind you, and no explanation for that, eh, Mr. Bruno?

"Finally, off Cape May, they disappeared and we didn't see them

again. Every word of that story is true, Mr. Bruno, and there are the pictures to back it up. So clear and good were they, that a big New York magazine published them, and lots of people tried to explain it away. But you couldn't explain away two dead men following a ship over six hundred miles, lying there in the wake as plain as day."

Bruno's brow was furrowed. "Wasn't there some explanation offered, to the effect that the suction of the ship's wake might have held the corpses behind her?"

Captain Lowrie chuckled sardonically. "There may have been some such explanation, Mr. Bruno. But you yourself at this very moment take little stock in it."

"Oh, well," Bruno muttered. "I'll admit that strange things happen on land or sea and that sometimes there isn't much explanation for them. But the legend of the Flying Dutchman is something else again, unless I've got it all wrong."

Captain Lowrie seated himself in a chair and tipped it back against the wall, balancing there precariously as the freighter pitched in the ponderous sea. He seemed quite at ease. He rubbed at his mustache with his left hand, and then proceeded to address himself to Mr. Bruno.

"The Flying Dutchman is the Wandering Jew of the ocean. Nobody knows what his name is now; it's forgotten over the years. But a long time ago, and on such a night as this, the Dutchman was rounding the Cape of Good Hope in a three-masted schooner. She was called the *Fleigende Hollander*.

"He was a turbulent and headstrong sailor, this Dutchman. The storm was against him. The winds were against him. The men on his decks begged him to turn back, but he refused. 'I'll round the Cape of Good Hope tonight,' he said, 'in spite of wind or storm or Heaven or Hell.'

"For thus defying the elements and the Devil, he was cursed, condemned to roam the oceans of the world until the crack of Doomsday. And there was only one thing could save him; the love of a woman who would be faithful to him after death."

Captain Lowrie chuckled. "You can see where the poor man never had a chance. Ain't a woman alive could-redeem him. It would take a lot of faith in these streamlined days."

Bruno grunted. "And do you actually believe, sir, that the Flying Dutchman exists today?"

"I don't say I do," replied Captain Lowrie, "and I don't say I don't."

A sliver of lightning cut across the night sky, followed by a reverberating crash of thunder. Murphy, at the helm, jerked, startled by its sound, and nearly loosed his grip upon the spoke. "He could be here," the helmsman faltered. "He could be right here, where he made his oath that stormy night some hundred years ago."

Bruno sprang to the wheel and grasped it. "Mind the course, you fool! You've dropped five points."

He turned and stared accusingly at Captain Lowrie who still perched on the chair, little bothered by the fact that the *Mary Watson's* bow had swung off the wind.

"There you see, sir, what good these tales of phantom ships can do. If it were only that they lent some color or adventure or glamor to the sea, I wouldn't mind them. But they make for terror and incompetency. They make men afraid and inefficient. That's why I don't believe in ghosts, Captain. And I'm a better seaman for it."

Captain Lowrie's bushy white eyebrows came far down over his eyes. He glowered at Bruno. "If it were only that such tales made men afraid," he said, "I would agree with you, Mr. Bruno. But why in the name of Davy Jones this lubber is afraid of the Dutchman is more than I can see. He's shaking like a leaf. I'll wager he cannot tell you why."

Murphy, his mouth grim and taut, clung to the helm and said nothing.

"Look here, man," said Captain Lowrie, "you expect the Dutchman will be out on a night like this looking for you to take you along to Hell with himself. Were he here, the Dutchman, poor soul, would only be trying to make the same passage we are, around the Cape against the storm.

"By the beard of St. Christopher, if he has one, I'd just as leave give him a tow if we met up with him. It would be the common courtesy of one seaman to another. And like as not he'd do the same for me. But the Dutchman, God save him, is busy on another sea in this world tonight, I'll wager."

He stirred in the chair and rose unsteadily to his feet as the freighter wallowed in the trough. "It's that late that I'm sleepy. So I'll catch my forty winks. The wind is holding steadily now, and should be dropping soon, and we'll be on our way. Tell Mr. McNulty

to stand by in case we need him. Keep a weather eye peeled for a shift in the wind. And if things don't get better, call me up again."

"Aye, sir," said Bruno.

III

Near three o'clock in the morning, some time after the ship's chronometer had rung out five bells, the wind began to slacken. The heavy dangerous sea did not abate in force, but the rain vanished and the wind dropped off so sharply that the spume on the breaking crest was no longer visible.

Down in the black hole of Calcutta, where the gleaming polished propeller-shaft faithfully ground out its r.p.m.'s, McNulty, the chief engineer, felt the *Mary Watson* gaining headway. The wind which had held them back now dissipated, allowing her, even at dead slow, to forge ahead.

Where before the freighter had expended only enough energy to equalize her position in the wind, now she was under way once more. And McNulty, a Scotchman who liked scones, Scotch and Beethoven, was glad of it. A few minutes later, and the engine room, telegraphed from the bridge, clanged its way to half speed.

McNulty marked the telegraph gyrations, and then turned up the turbine engine. It was a pleasure to feel the *Mary Watson* bite steadily and head due east once more.

On the bridge, where the remnants of the wind still howled past the corners, Bruno noted his course on the chart. He felt very good. But he was enough of a realist to know that they were not out of the woods yet. He no longer doubted they would make the passage safely; but he was afraid that in making it the *Mary Watson* would reach Zanzibar with a stove-in hatch.

Still there was no choice. The gale had blown them far west of their course, and they had lost both precious time and fuel. Bruno telephoned the captain, and the old man agreed with him that the steady old tub should be pushed with as much speed as she could safely handle in the seaway.

At three-fifteen, the ragged clouds vanished, and the darkness of the bridge was suddenly illumined with pale moonlight. It was very faint, for streaky will-o'-the-wisps still scurried across its slender face. But there was, at least, some visibility and Bruno was heartened.

The wave crest ran high, but no longer broke. The glassy hollows,

where salt bubbles split rapidly, were long and deep. One moment, as the *Mary Watson* topped a grayback, Mr. Bruno could see miles of ridged, pock-marked sea. Then would follow the awesome drop into the trough, where the horizon would merely be the top of the next wave away.

Eastbound, the sea was on their corners, and the *Mary Watson* rolled alarmingly in the swell. But her speed steadied her somewhat, even though the going was very wet forward. And Bruno knew that by dawn the Cape of Good Hope would be astern.

Franklin, the second officer, presently joined Bruno on the bridge. It was not his stint, but it had been a rotten night to sleep, and Franklin was just as glad to be out of his bunk.

At three-thirty A.M., a strange intensity pervaded the entire ship. Overhead, the moon suddenly hid itself behind a bulky cloud. There was only the faintest indication of moonlight left upon the turbulent crest.

In his cabin Captain John Lowrie, who had been snoring lustily, suddenly awoke out of a sound sleep for no reason at all and sat up in his bunk, disturbed and apprehensive.

In the engine rooms, McNulty, who had all but surrendered his duties to his assistant, McAdoo, content that the ship was well out of trouble, returned suddenly to his post, vaguely worried and not knowing why.

In the galley, where the ship's cook had bedded himself down for the night, Toby, the ship's cat, who had been sleeping serenely upon the breadbox, suddenly awoke, backed to a corner and began to growl, the long hairs down his back standing straight up on end.

On the bridge they felt it, too. Bruno looked up from his place at the chart table and shivered. He was not cold, and he did not know why he had done it. Franklin, who had been sitting in the chair that Captain Lowrie had vacated, suddenly stirred uneasily and rubbed the backs of his hands briskly.

"That's funny," he said. "I've just had the strangest feeling—"

Bruno met his eyes. They stared at each other.

The starboard door of the bridge opened, and Captain Lowrie walked in. He did not say anything, just walked to the chart table and sat down beside Bruno. There was a frown on his face and he looked worried.

"It was as if," Captain Lowrie would tell his wife some months later, in Boston, "we had all gone to a concert. It was that moment

of great sense of silence, as the baton goes up just before the music begins."

It was like that, that charged moment before the baton drops, when you can almost imagine you hear the music even before it has begun. The sea, there, pounding on her starboard quarter, might have been a kettle-drum. The dying wind, still whining high, might have been the first violin.

And under their feet, the freighter dropped into a deep and darkened valley. The boat wallowed there a moment, panting, and then with sovereign dignity forced her blunt bow up the wall of water which came rushing on. And when she reached the peak of that watery mountain she paused, as if to survey the studded voyage before her.

Young Murphy at the helm suddenly gaped into the faintly luminous night before his eyes.

"In the name of Heaven!" Murphy said hollowly.

The other three—Captain Lowrie, Bruno, and Franklin—moved as one man. They sprang to their feet, instantly aware of Murphy's contorted face.

It was fear, Captain Lowrie knew. He had seen it often enough. The eyes, all white and glazed, the blanched skin, the dropped jaw which hung on Murphy's chest, the quivering mouth. They, too, faced the sea and watched expectantly beyond the waves.

Out of the night, like a great white ghost, they saw the ship. She was about a hundred feet long, her sails all set and filled. Captain Lowrie had never seen such a color in sails before. Blood red they were, like a dying sunset; the strangest color his eyes had ever seen: for the moonlight was faint, and in the back of his mind he wondered how sails of any color could be that bright.

She was on the starboard tack, heeled well over, and she had a white bone in her teeth. There were moving shadows of men on her decks. The *Mary Watson* was bound east, but this strange schooner with her blood-red sails was bound due north and she seemed to come right at them.

Her speed was amazing. She seemed to plunge ahead much faster than the wind which filled her sails.

Through binoculars, Captain Lowrie could see a name upon her bow; but it was hazy and indistinct through the glass, and he could not make it out.

But he could make out her figurehead. At the base of the bowsprit,

wet and glistening as the heavy bow plunged into the waves, he made out the grinning death's head.

Three masts, sticking up into the sky nakedly like inverted streaks of lightning, a death's head at the bow, blood-red sails; a schooner in a storm at the Cape of Good Hope, and an oath with the Devil.

"The Dutchman!" Captain Lowrie roared. "The Flying Dutchman!"

IV

Bruno wrenched the binoculars away from the captain's grasp and peered out into the night himself. The glasses trembled in his hand. They were seven-power glasses and hard to hold upon the scene, but he managed it a moment and then dropped them from his eyes; and he was white and shaking.

"It's not The Dutchman," he said savagely. "It's a ship, a sailing ship, and she's running without lights. Sheer off, helmsman, sheer off to port. She'll strike us!"

But Franklin had already wrested the wheel from the quarter-master and he was bringing it hard over. The freighter's bow swung northward from east, and in the cross-sea the *Mary Watson* rolled dangerously.

"She's a phantom," Captain Lowrie said hoarsely. "She's the Dutchman out of Holland, trying to round the Cape."

"You're mad!" Bruno snapped. "She's just a ship, an old sea trader, perhaps."

Captain Lowrie had the binoculars again. He held them on her bow as she came closer to them. "*Fliegende Hollander*," he said, his voice trembling. "It's there on the bow, under the bowsprit, as plain as day. Look for yourself, man! Her name is there, right there—the *Fliegende Hollander*, and her hailing port is Amsterdam."

"It's your imagination; you are all filled up with the Dutchman's lore," Bruno replied.

And then he said nothing more. There was no time to say anything more. Silently and tensely they watched her come. She was a savage ship, and she laid the water white around her bow, her bowsprit stabbing the sea like a guard sword.

She was very close now; so close that they could see the sailors on her deck. They seemed to be Norwegian. And back on the poop-deck, by the great helm, there stood a tall, broad man with a great black cape around his shoulders.

His nose was large, and he had a heavy beard; and as the schooner bore upon them, Captain Lowrie could see this man wave a burly hand.

For a moment, it looked as if she would strike them near the stern, as if to slash the combing and the screw clean off, and leave the rest of the *Mary Watson* floating in the ocean, a powerless hulk. In that breathless moment, Captain Lowrie saw her flag, curling out to leeward above the blood-red sails. It was the flag of Holland.

Bruno saw it, too. "It could be a Dutch ship, and nothing more," he whispered. "A Dutch ship, an ordinary ship, and nothing more." He was talking to reassure himself, but they all heard him.

"She's the Dutchman," Captain Lowrie said, quietly now. "Stand by for a crash."

But there was no crash. The black ship, when she had forced the *Mary Watson* to turn due north, suddenly sheered off. They could see her captain, that big bearded man at the helm, swinging the wheel hard, and her bow, with a death's head for a figurehead, swung off the freighter's stern and turned northwest.

Swiftly she was abaft. They saw her dip into the deep trough between two towering crests. Only her curling flag and the tops of the three masts were left visible. And suddenly they sank down, too, and seemed to vanish.

When the next wave away reached that spot to lift her to its top, she did not rise. Indeed, she was no longer there.

"She's gone!" Franklin gasped.

"Gone, indeed," Captain Lowrie said.

Bruno, his brow lined with multiple wrinkles, peered intently at the spot where he had last seen her. "Has she sunk?" he said. "Did she go down?"

Nobody answered his questions. Captain Lowrie murmured, "He sheered off. Did you see him sheer off? He didn't mean to strike us in the first place. He was satisfied to push us off our course. That was all he wanted. It was as plain as day; and having done that he's gone and vanished like any good ghost should."

The blood was flowing back into Bruno's cheeks. He straightened, and felt more assured.

"Ghost, my eye!" he snapped. "He would have cut us in half if he hadn't seen us at the last moment. The captain of that ship is a fool. I wish we could have got her name, and reported her. He picked a fine stormy night to be running without lights."

He scanned the turbulent seas for some sign of her. But there was none. "But where did she go?"

Captain Lowrie did not attempt to answer him. He addressed himself to Franklin.

"Bring her back, mister," he said. "Bring her back on the east-bound route. I don't know the meaning of it, but it's over and done. So let's be on our way again, with the sea on the quarter. This old lady is panting—she never did like a following sea."

Franklin brought back the helm, and the *Mary Watson* soon turned slowly eastward, where a faint leaden glow was beginning to touch the sky, off in eternity where the sea met the heavens.

The telephone rang. Captain Lowrie answered it. It was McNulty, calling from the black hole of Calcutta, annoyed and bothered. "Captain, sir," he said, "must we be staying in a following sea? When my screws near the surface, they all but shake my shaft out of its bearings."

"I've other things to worry about beside your shaft," Captain Lowrie replied. "The course is my concern, and the shaft is yours. Mr. McNulty. So mind your P's and Q's. There'll be no more following seas if we can help it. But then again, I ain't in a position to make any promises."

He hung up abruptly.

About ten minutes had passed since they had last seen the three-masted will-o'-the-wisp bury itself in that trough.

The wind had all but died. The rain had definitely vanished. The seas were beginning to drop. But only slightly. The cloud which hid the moon passed on, and the night was once again filled with a silver glow.

The four men stood up at the weatherbreak now, watching the night sharply. Only Captain Lowrie's face seemed relaxed. Murphy's was afraid. Bruno's was taut. Franklin's was harried.

And while they stood there, they felt it again, that strange fluttering feeling upon their hearstrings. Like violins in tremolo. Bruno shivered; his hands felt icy cold.

"Mind the helm," Captain Lowrie said sharply.

Franklin had raised his left hand. He pointed it out past the weatherbreak. In awed, sepulchral tone he said, "Look!"

They looked. But Captain Lowrie had already seen it. "Aye," he said coolly. "She's back again."

Mr. Murphy, the quartermaster, tried to keep his teeth from

chattering. But he could not manage it. The cracking sound of them filled the bridge.

It was true enough. She was back again. But this time she came from the north. All of her sails were set, and her lee scuppers were awash. She was running close-hauled, and her bow was under a wall of water most of the time.

Bruno stared at the flag upon his own mast. It curled to the south. That meant the wind had shifted.

"But how," Bruno asked in a choked voice, "can she run close-hauled against the wind which is directly astern of her?"

"She ain't no ordinary ship," Captain Lowrie replied. "And not a ship to be afraid of, either, mister," he remarked to the trembling quartermaster. "Only three hours back, I offered the Dutchman a tow around Good Hope, if need be. It ain't like one good seaman to return ill to another good seaman, when only good has been offered. He means well, no doubt. But what he means, I can't yet fathom."

Bruno said, "But the wind has all but died. How can a ship point down with such speed when there isn't any wind to push her?"

"I told you, mister," answered Captain Lowrie, "she ain't no ordinary ship."

No more was said. They all stood stock still, tense, and watched her come. She had seemed far ahead of them to port when they first sighted her again. But already she was much closer. There was white water all around her. She seemed to slash at the ocean. The *Mary Watson's* own speed had carried her far ahead, so that now the schooner with the red sails was sharply off the port bow.

"A mirage," Bruno said thickly. "A mirage." He spoke with hope, not with conviction. He, too, like the quartermaster, was trembling.

The schooner seemed so close now that they could have thrown a belaying pin upon her deck. And suddenly her intentions were plain. She held her way, adamantly, and every man on the fated bridge knew what she would do.

She was going to cut across their bow. Cut across them, sharp and close, impaling herself upon their forepiece if necessary. She would her helm, firm and resolute, had frozen there.

not give way this time, she would not sheer off. The bearded man at

Captain Lowrie sprang to the engine-room telegraph and swung it to full speed astern. In the engine room, McNulty went crazy, wondering what was happening topside.

The *Mary Watson* groaned and paused in the seaway as her single

engine went into reverse. The lone screw churned the water white behind her, imparting a terrific vibration throughout her hull, which threatened to split the rusty plates asunder.

The freighter almost made it, but not quite. Despite her revolving screw pulling her full speed astern, her impetus carried her forward. Under her bow, where her anchors clung to their niches, the schooner with the blood-red sails passed. She looked big and real now, although the men on her deck still seemed to be shadows.

Captain Lowrie and the others braced themselves for the crash. Surely it would be her beam, directly in their path. In a moment, there would be the splintering wood of her hull flying up, smacked by the steel bow of the *Mary Watson*. But she moved faster than even they had reckoned.

Her beam flashed by. Her foam-drenched combing went next, so close to the sharp prow of the freighter that the wash, compressed between the two, catapulted straight up high into the air and crashed upon the freighter's forepiece.

Captain Lowrie said, in a quite low voice, "We'll hit her stern, sure." Automatically, he braced himself.

The other men seemed to be caught in a sort of paralysis.

V

It came. It was dull, not sharp. For all they knew, it might have been the blow of a chance sea. But they felt it distinctly.

A tremor ran through the *Mary Watson's* spine. Captain Lowrie found himself on the exposed port wingtip of the bridge, shouting wildly. Bruno, inside, telegraphed the engine room to stand by.

There was no sound of broken wood. No sound, in fact, except the great roaring silence which swelled in their ears. The freighter paused, her screws stilled, and lolled there in the glassy interim which divided the crests.

Bruno stuck out his head from within the bridge. "Where did she go?"

But Captain Lowrie could not answer that question, for he did not know himself. Where had she gone indeed? Captain Lowrie had seen her gaunt black stern go off the starboard, the windows high in the transom all soundlessly shattered. He had seen the gaping gash in her combing and bowline, where the *Mary Watson* had eaten into the planking.

But when the three-master was definitely a-starboard, she seemed

to burn with a pale, mysterious moonlight; and in a few moments she was gone again, completely, gracefully, the seas slowly merging into every part of her, until there was nothing left but sea, all around where she had been.

From the wingtip where he stood, Captain Lowrie could fancy that he had seen that great Dutchman at the helm give one last lusty wave before the night swallowed him alive.

"We sank her!" Bruno cried.

"We sank nothing," Captain Lowrie replied. "Is Mr. McNulty standing by?"

"Aye, sir."

"Keep him standing by. Prepare to heave to for the night. I'll not let another inch of ocean fly past my barnacles until I can see by the light of day just where I'm going."

"We've got to stand by anyway, sir," Bruno said. "She's gone down. There'll be survivors, perhaps."

"There'll be no survivors."

"If we could only have gotten her name," Bruno faltered. "We could have radioed Cape Town."

"Radio no one, mind you. Radio no one, Mr. Bruno. No word of this to get about until we see what's what."

Dawn was long delayed; but it had a sun when it did come up. In that first cold light of dawn—and there is no colder light than the first sunless break of day upon a sea—Bruno went forward with some of the crew to inspect the damage to the bow. When he returned, his face was a picture of complete stupefaction.

"What was the damage?" Captain Lowrie asked.

Bruno's mouth worked. "Not a sign of damage, sir. Not a scratch on her paint. Nothing, sir."

Captain Lowrie stared. Ahead of him, the sun broke from the rim of the horizon, yellow and glaring. "Aye," he muttered, as if to himself. "First he drove us to the north, off our eastern course. Then he cut across our bow to make us stop our way."

"He had a purpose, the Dutchman did. One good turn deserves another. Me, speaking offhand on a dark and stormy night, offering him a tow, wherever he might be. And him to reciprocate, out of a black dark sea, and maybe save my command."

Bruno looked perplexed. "I don't understand, sir," he said.

"There are some things beyond understanding," Captain Lowrie said. "Send a look out aloft and tell him to keep a weather eye peeled,

and signal Mr. McNulty to proceed at dead slow until he gets further orders."

The lookout went aloft, squatting in the crow's nest high above the bridge. Slowly and stubbornly, the *Mary Watson* ploughed along.

They did not have to wait long. By the time the sun had detached itself from the rim of the sea, painting their faces, the lookout reported. From the crow's nest, in the windless quiet of the morning, his excited cry dropped down on Bruno, who stood beneath him on the boatdeck.

"Whale, ho!" the lookout bellowed.

"Where away?" Mr. Bruno replied.

"Dead ahead," said the lookout. "Just rolling there. I can hardly see him. It's the rim of his spine above water, and nothing more!"

Bruno instantly relayed this news to the bridge. The *Mary Watson* paused in her stride and then stopped. Captain Lowrie, peering through his binoculars, found the hump in the ocean. He stared at it for a long time. "Whale, my eye!" he grunted. "Have a look, Mr. Bruno."

Bruno accepted the glasses eagerly. He peered through them for a long time, too. Finally he said, in a hollow voice. "You're right, sir. That's no whale. It's a hulk, a floating derelict, and from what I see of her upturned keel she's a big one."

Captain Lowrie nodded. "Two hundred feet of her, at least," he said reflectively. "And all her wood probably water-logged. Nice to have struck upon her. You might just as well have put dynamite in our bow, for the hole she would have torn there."

"An old clipper ship, sir," Franklin hazarded.

"Maybe so, mister," Captain Lowrie said. "I ain't seen a keel like that in a long, long time."

Bruno's face held an odd expression. He ruminated slowly, "The storm must have driven her northward. That would have put her more to the south a few hours back. If we had continued in our east-bound track, we might have struck her."

"Then we turned north. But the wind and waves were blowing her north, too. Good Lord, sir, it gives me the creeps to think of what might have happened if we had not hove to until daybreak."

"Thanks to the Dutchman, and a ready tow for him," said Captain Lowrie soberly. "Whether he be in the seas of Heaven, or in the oceans of Hell."

"It's a strange thing," Bruno said, his eyes smoky with thought.

"A very strange thing. And not the sort of thing a man can tell his wife in Boston when he sees home again."

Captain Lowrie nodded. "Right, mister. And you only to be ridiculed and laughed at for the telling of such a tale. And if your hair were a mite gray, the younger blades might be calling *you* an old fool, too."

"It could have been a mirage," Bruno said, as if he didn't believe it himself.

"It could have been," Captain Lowrie agreed. "But mirage or no, it did its work, and all of us should be grateful for it. Helmsman, point her head off that wreck. Mr. Bruno, you may telegraph Mr. McNulty to proceed at half speed."

"Mr. Franklin, will you kindly stop by at the radio shack and tell Sparks to wireless Cape Town, a warning to all shipping in the vicinity of Good Hope. Give the location of the wreck and our present position. That will do. As for myself, I'm going below. If I'm needed, you've only to call me up again."

Bruno stared through the weatherbreak as the freighter gained way again. "Look," he said, "look off there! Porpoises. A whole island of them!"

At the door, Captain Lowrie paused. There was a faint smile on his face. "And what does that mean, mister?"

"It means, sir," replied Bruno quietly, "that we shall have good passage from here to Zanzibar."

"Aye," Captain Lowrie nodded, and he went out. But as he went, you could see by the expression on his face that he was very well pleased with his first officer.

THE END

The Moose That Talked

By C. A. Dixon

My grandfather who was a famous hunter in the old west often hunted with an Arizona scout called Bill Williams. One night as they sat around the campfire, their talk turned to reincarnation.

"If your soul leaves your body and goes into something else," Bill said, "What do you want to be?"

Grandfather said, "I'd want to be an eagle. He doesn't have to climb mountains to do his hunting."

Bill Williams said, "When I come back, I'll be a bull moose. I'll be king of these canyons. And if you are still hunting in these parts, pardner, I'll take care of you, never fear. I'll take care of all my old friends."

"Can I count on that, Bill?" Grandfather asked.

"'Taint likely either one of us will come back as anything," Bill replied, "but if I do, you can bank on it shore."

Bill died a few months later and shortly afterwards Grandfather stopped hunting. Several years later, a great mineral cavern was discovered in that territory. Grandfather's business was mining so he asked me if I would like to join him in a visit to the cave.

We made up a pack train and started for the canyon. Our little outfit reached it at noon on the second day. Then we began to climb the winding ledge which was the only trail up the rocky mountain-side to the cave. We had almost reached our objective when a huge, antlered shape leaped into the trail ahead of us. Snorting defiance, he stood his ground, pawing sparks from the flinty path.

Grandfather came to a halt and I cocked my rifle. "Wait a moment. He'll go away," he said. But the bull moose stood there, blocking our trail.

"We're losing time," I protested. "He's an easy shot."

"No," said grandfather. "Hold on a few minutes longer." A memory was stirring in his mind.

So we waited and as we stood there a heavy rumbling rose in

the distance and grew like the sound of a cyclone except that the walls of the canyon began to tremble. In the distance, I saw dust spurting off canyon walls and boulders rolling like loose shot down the canyon bed.

"Landslide," grandfather yelled. "Climb out of here."

We started up the precipice, grabbing rocks and roots. The moose tried to regain the path from which he had come but a surf of stones tore about his legs and he went down. When he struggled up, one foot dangled grotesquely. He hopped a few feet against the flinty current but the slope was too great. Lifting his head, he looked back at us and his voice made a hoarse, pleading trumpet note . . . a desperate entreaty . . . that was unlike anything I ever heard. A tide of boulders was racing toward him but he faced them, braced for the shock, unconquered.

Grandfather lifted his rifle and took careful aim. His bullet crashed into the base of the moose's skull. A second later, the avalanche lifted the massive body and carried it down the canyon on a current of shattered rock.

When the slide had run its course, grandfather and I climbed back to the trail. The ledge had been obliterated. Where we would have stood, if the bull moose had not stopped us, was now a heap of splinters and powdered rock. Soberly, grandfather retraced his path until he found the battered hulk of the old bull moose, the most majestic animal I have ever seen, even in death.

Grandfather looked him over carefully and finally seemed satisfied with what he found. It was a mark, a brand composed of two initials burned high up on the inside of the animal's left foreleg. The initials were worn and misshapen now but even I could see that they were a B and a W. . . .

Grandfather made a crude grave from the splintered rock and placed a green fir at its head. I heard him say, "It was the only thing I could do."

Then he and I stood for a long time in meditation while grandfather prayed softly for the soul of his old and faithful friend Bill Williams.

THE END

Speak to Me of Death

The Prophet said, "Death by the jaws of a lion," and not even Tim Shane could defy the will of the stars.

By Cornell Woolrich

A slick-looking roadster stopped in front of Headquarters at about nine that night, and its lone occupant sat there in it for a moment before cutting the ignition, as if trying to make up her mind what to do. The car had money written all over it, money without flash. The number was so low it was almost zero. The girl in it took a cigarette out of the box fitted to the door, pulled a patented lighter out of the dash, inhaled deeply as if to brace herself. Then she got out and went up the steps between the two dark-green lights.

She was tall and slim and young. She wore a little leopard-skin jacket that didn't come below her elbows. The price of it probably ran into three figures. Her face was pale, paler than powder could have made it. At the top of the steps she took a second and final drag. Then she dropped the cigarette, stepped on it, and went in. She asked to see the lieutenant in charge.

His name was McManus and he brought a chair forward with his own hands for her in the back room. She was that kind of a girl.

She said, "My name is Ann Bridges," then she looked down at the floor. You could see her wrists were trembling, where she held them folded over one knee. Diamond-splinters flashed around her wrist-watch from the slight vibration.

"Any relative of John T. Bridges?" McManus said.

Ann Bridges looked up again. "I'm his niece," she said. "In fact, his only relative." She took it in her stride, said it almost off-handedly. To McManus it was a stunning piece of information; it was like finding yourself in the same room with the heir-apparent to a throne.

He never thought of doubting her. There was something 14-karat about her that couldn't have been faked.

She said, "It isn't the pleasantest thing in the world to come to the police like this—" she broke off abruptly. Then she went ahead: "I don't even know what there is you people can do about it. But something's got to be done—"

McManus' voice was kind. "You tell me what it is."

"That's the worst part of it. It doesn't sound like anything when you tell it. Anything at all. But it is something!" Her voice rose almost to the point of hysteria. "I can't just stand by and watch him—sink into the grave before my eyes! I had to tell somebody—had to get it off my chest! I've waited too long as it is!" Her eyes misted. "I've driven down here four nights in a row—and the first three times I lost my nerve and drove on around the block without stopping. I said to myself, 'Ann, they'll think you're crazy.'"

McManus went over to her and rested a fatherly hand on her shoulder. "We don't laugh at people," he said gently. "We run across anything and everything, in our line—but we don't laugh at people who are in trouble." It wasn't because she was Ann Bridges; it was because she was so young and lovely and there was such distress written on her face.

"Something has hold of us," she said. "Something that started in by being nothing at all, by being just a joke over the luncheon-table; something that's grown and grown, until now it's like an octopus throttling us. I can't name it to you, because I don't know what to call it, don't know what it is. It threatens him, not me, but I love him, and so the threat is to the two of us."

She gave a little sob in her throat.

"Call it a prophecy, call it fate—call it what you will. I fought against it hard enough, God knows. But the evidence of my own eyes, my own ears, my own senses, is too much for me. And the time's too short now. I'm afraid to take a chance. I haven't got the nerve to bluff it out. You don't gamble with a human life. Today's the 13th, isn't it? It's too close to the 14th; there isn't time-margin enough left now to be skeptical. Day by day, I've watched him cross off the date on his desk-calendar, drawing nearer to death. There are only two leaves left now, and I want help! Because on the 14th—at the exact stroke of midnight, just as the 15th is beginning—"

She covered her face with both arms and shook silently.

"Yes?" urged McManus. "Yes?"

"He's become convinced—oh, and almost I have too—that at

exactly midnight on the 14th he's to die. Not just an ordinary death, but a death rushing down to him from the stars he was born under—rushing down even before he existed. A death inexorable, inescapable. A death horrid and violent, inconceivable here in this part of the world where we live."

She took a deep, shuddering breath, whispered the rest of it. "Death at the jaws of a lion."

McManus didn't answer for an awfully long time. When he spoke, it wasn't to her at all. He opened the door, called to someone, said "I'm not to be disturbed—until further orders, hear?"

When he came back to her she said limply. "Thanks—for not laughing, for not smelling my breath, for not hinting that I should see a doctor. Oh, thanks, anyway!"

He took a package of cigarettes out of the desk-drawer, passed them to her. "I like you modern kids," he said paternally. "Smoke up. Pull yourself together. Tell it in your own way. Begin at the beginning—and tell it right straight through—"

CHAPTER II

It all started (Ann Bridges said) about an airplane ride. My Uncle John was going to 'Frisco on business, and he'd bought his ticket. He showed it to me at lunch, and I saw that the take-off was dated Friday the 13th. Half kidding, I suggested he put off leaving until the day after. There'd been a bad crack-up a week before, but lord! we were both joking, not serious about it!

My maid must have overheard us. She came to me later and said, "Beg your pardon, miss, but if that were I, I'd never let him do a thing like that."

I said, "Be your age."

She said, "I know of someone who could warn you, if there is to be any trouble. A man who's gifted with second sight. Why don't you let me take you to him?"

I gave her a cold look and I said, "Just what do I look like to you? Are you seriously suggesting that I go to some flea-bitten fortune-teller with a dirty cloth wrapped around his head and—"

"He's not a fortune-teller," she defended. "He'd resent being called that. He doesn't make a profession of it, and he doesn't take money for it."

"I bet he doesn't refuse it, either," I said cynically.

"He's a good man," she said stoutly, "not a sharper of any kind. He happens to be born with this gift, he can't help that. He doesn't trade on it in any way; in fact, he doesn't like to use it. My family and I have known him for years—"

I smiled to myself, as anyone would have. "He's certainly sold himself to you, Elaine."

"We won't talk any more about it, miss," she said stiffly. "Only, you remember that time I was in trouble—" She'd gotten mixed up with some man, and I'd straightened it out for her; it wouldn't be fair for me to give you the details. "You were the only one knew about that, Miss Bridges, I didn't say a word at home, I didn't dare. He took me aside one night and told me the whole thing. He told me how it was going to end up, too. He said the man was going to meet death, and I'd be rid of him once and for all. I fainted dead away on the floor. You remember how we heard two months later he'd been run over on the street?"

I did, but my skepticism wouldn't dent much. "You didn't say a word to me at the time, how was that?"

"He made me promise not to. I've broken my word to him today. He doesn't want it to become known. He hates his gift himself, says it caused him nothing but misery—"

All of which sounded reasonable enough, but I was definitely not impressed. I've had very good commonsense all my life, and you have to watch your step—when you're the heir to twenty millions.

My uncle took off from Newark early the next morning, and when I got back to the house the maid blurted out: "There's nothing to worry about, Miss Bridges. I—I asked him about this trip, and he said it was safe to make it."

"Oh you did, did you?" I said severely. "And who told you to?"

"I didn't tell him who it was or anything about it. Just asked him about this morning's plane," she defended. But Mr. Bridges needn't have gone at all, could have saved himself the trouble. He told me that whoever this party is that's going out there, he or she is doomed to disappointment; nothing will come of it, he'll just have wasted his time."

My uncle's in the import and export business, he'd gone to see about an important consignment of silk from Japan, but the maid couldn't have known that, much less this seer of hers. I'm afraid I snickered rudely.

Nothing daunted, she rushed on: "But don't let Mr. John come back by air, Miss Bridges, whatever you do! Wire him to take the

train instead. The eastbound-plane is going to run into trouble—he saw it clearly. Not a crack-up but it's going to be grounded somewhere in the Rockies and half of them are going to die of exposure before they're located. He saw snow piled all around it and people with frozen hands and feet having to have them amputated later—"

I blew up. I said, "One more word out of you, and I'll give you your week's notice!"

She didn't open her mouth from then on, just went around looking sorry for me.

Uncle John had told me he was starting back the following Saturday. Take-off was at seven Pacific Coast Time, ten back here. I'll admit I got a little worried Friday night, wondered whether or not I oughtn't to send that wire after all. I was afraid he'd laugh at me. More than that even, I hated to give in to her after the way I'd talked. I went to bed without sending the wire. It was too late when I woke up in the morning, he would have started already.

He should have gotten in about noon Sunday. I drove to the airport to meet him, and he wasn't on the plane. That gave me a nasty turn. I asked at the airport-office, and they told me he had booked a seat from Chicago east, along with several other people, on this one, and none of them had shown up to make the connection; the 'Frisco plane had been overdue when they left Chicago.

I went home plenty worried. It was in the papers and on the radio already, reported missing somewhere over the Rockies with fourteen people in it!

The maid saw how I was taking it, so finally she came out with: "I suppose I'm discharged, but I knew better than you—I took the liberty of sending Mr. John a wire over your name last night, begging him to come by train instead—"

Discharged? I could have kissed her! But then anxiety raised its head again. "He's stubborn, he'd never listen to a message like that—"

"I—I told him that one of his associates wanted to consult him about a very important matter, and mentioned a place where the planes don't stop, so he'd have to take the train. He says," she went on, "that it won't be found for three days, the plane. It wouldn't have meant death, it isn't Mr. John's time yet, but he would have lost both feet and been a helpless cripple for the rest of his—"

All of which evoked a pretty creepy feeling in me. It wasn't any help when my uncle got off the train three days later, safe and sound. The first words out of his mouth were that he'd made the trip for nothing; a maritime strike had broken out on the Coast and his silk-

shipment was tied up indefinitely at Honolulu; he hadn't been able to accomplish a thing.

The snow-bound plane was sighted from the air later that same day, and when the rescue parties got to it, seven of the fourteen were dead from exposure, and several of the survivors had to have their hands or feet amputated as soon as they got to a hospital. Just as he'd foretold—rescue-date, circumstances, number of casualties, and all. It was uncanny. I didn't want to believe, I fought like anything against believing—and yet there it was.

I told my uncle the whole story of course—who wouldn't have?—and he was as impressed as I was. What we did next was what anyone else would have done after what happened. We asked the maid to take the two of us to this man, we wanted to see him for ourselves. She wasn't to tell him who we were, just two friends of hers. I even put on an old coat and hat of hers, to look properly working-class, and we left the car home, went there on foot.

It was a big let down, at first. This fortune teller was merely a middle-aged man sitting in a furnished room with his suspenders hanging down! His name was Jeremiah Tompkins, about as unimpressive a name as they come. And worst of all, he was just a book-keeper. Had been, rather, for he wasn't working just then. If I remember correctly, he was reading the want ads in a newspaper when we came in.

I could see my uncle was more disappointed; he was almost resentful. After all, Uncle John was a level-headed intelligent businessman. That a figure like this should be able to spout prophecies, should know more than he did himself about what was going to happen to him, was too much for him to swallow.

"Watch," he said to me out of the corner of his mouth, "I'll show you. I'll show you he's just a phony, that all this was just a coincidence. I've got something here that's the best little miracle-eraser in the world!"

And he took out five-hundred dollars in cold cash and pressed it into Tompkins' hand. Tompkins had been reading the want ads, remember, and Elaine told me later her people were having him in for meals out of sheer pity.

"You've done something for me that I can never repay," my uncle said as a come-on. "This is just a token of my gratitude. Call on me at any time and I'll be more than glad to—"

Tompkins didn't let him finish. He threw the money down at my uncle's feet. "I don't like being insulted," he said quietly. There was

a sort of dignity about the way he said it, at that. I didn't do this for money, and I won't take money for it. This girl here—" he pointed at Elaine—"is a friend of mine. She asked me some questions about a plane and I answered them for her, that's all. Please go. I don't like being made a show of."

"But you don't know who I am," my uncle began protestingly.

Tompkins gave a bleak smile and put his hand up to his head, as though he had a headache. Not in that theatrical way clairvoyants do when they're about to "go into their trance," but as though something were hurting him.

He answered as though he were speaking against his will. "You're John Bridges," he said. "Your mother died when you were fourteen years old, and it was the sight of the beautiful silk kimonos and wrappers she wore that really made you go into the export and import business later on . . ."

Elaine could have told him all that, was the unspoken thought in my mind.

He turned to me and answered it as though it had been said aloud. I went white and nearly fell through the floor! "But here's something she couldn't have," he said. "About you. You took off your dance-slippers under a restaurant-table one night last week and a waiter accidentally kicked one halfway across the room. Rather than admit it was yours, you left in your stocking-feet. And you've got a diamond and ruby necklace with twenty stones in it in Safety Box No. 1805 at the National Security Bank. Also a bundle of letters you bought back from a gigolo in Paris for fifty thousand francs."

My own uncle didn't know about that!

"I don't ask you to believe in me, I don't care whether you do or not," this Tompkins went on sombrely. "I didn't ask you to come here in the first place. You're going to the police about me some day, anyway, and get me in a lot of trouble."

My hands strayed up and down the blank wall trying to find the door where there wasn't any door. My eyes were blurred. I moaned, "Get me out of here!" The whole world was turning upside-down. I felt like a fly walking on the ceiling.

My uncle took me home. The five hundred stayed there on Tompkins' floor. Elaine brought it back with her when she returned, after we did.

"Wouldn't touch it," she murmured. "What do you think he did, though? Borrowed five dollars from me, to tide himself over."

That business of the \$500 sold the fortune-teller to my uncle more

than any number of bull's-eye predictions could have. He was convinced now that Jeremiah Tompkins wasn't a fake. That he was a phenomenon; and ordinary, in fact sub-ordinary, human being with this frightful gift—or blight—of prognostication. In other words, the ground work of credulity had been laid. The rest followed in due course.

To begin with Uncle John tried to make the man a gift of money again—no longer to show him up, but in all sincerity and respect. He mailed him his personal check, for \$1,000 this time. It came back inside a readdressed envelope, almost by return mail, torn into eight neat pieces. That failing, my uncle got Tompkins a job—and made sure he accept it by keeping his own name out of it. He had a friend advertise for a bookkeeper. The friend, without knowing the details, agreed to bar all except one of the applicants who might answer it—Jeremiah Tompkins. In other words, it was a one-man ad. Elaine was posted to call the man's attention to it in the paper, in case it should escape his eye. It all worked out according to plan; he took the job.

"But," I insisted stubbornly to the two of them, "if he's the actual mindreader he showed himself to be, how is it he didn't know at once who was in back of this paid ad you showed him? Why couldn't he see that the job came through Uncle John?"

"He doesn't go around all day reading what's in people's minds—he'd kill himself doing that." Elaine protested, as though I had disparaged the man. "It seems to come to him in flashes, only when he'll let it—and he doesn't like to. It's there in his unconscious self the whole time." She meant subconscious. "And he lets it flicker out once in awhile, or else it gets out in spite of him—I don't know."

Anyway, Tompkins took the job, and if he was a firstclass mystic, he wasn't any great shakes as a bookkeeper. My uncle's friend had to let him go in about six weeks. The friend didn't, of course, know the inside story; he claimed the man was too moony and moody—in plain English, shiftless.

Meanwhile Tompkins kept getting under my uncle's skin deeper and deeper. The strike on the Pacific Coast gave signs of going on all the rest of the summer. The silk shipment, which was worth thousands, was stuck there in Honolulu, rotting away. My uncle got an offer from a Japanese dealer in the islands, considerably below its intrinsic value, let alone any profit. It looked like a case of take what he could get or lose the whole thing. It wasn't a question of the money so much, with him, but he hated to come out second best in any transaction, hated to admit himself licked.

He'd already drafted the cable accepting the Jap offer, then at the last minute held it without filing. He went and looked up Tompkins by himself, without confiding in anyone.

I don't know what passed between them. All I know is that Uncle John came home that night and told me he'd cabled the Japs to go to hell; the shipping strike was going to be over in forty-eight hours, right when the deadlock seemed at its worst.

I don't have to remind you what happened. You've read how the Chief Executive himself intervened unexpectedly two days later and the strike was arbitrated and called off between sun-up and sundown. The president's own advisers hadn't known he was going to do it, so it was said. My uncle's consignment beat every other cargo into 'Frisco; and by getting into port first—well, it was quite a windfall. Uncle John got exactly double the usual price for the shipment.

A man in a shabby furnished-room, without a job of his own, had saved his firm exactly \$200,000 all told!

I kept out of it from then on. I wanted to hang onto my peace of mind; more than that even, my sanity.

But then the thing finally clamped down on my uncle, as anyone might have known it would eventually. Three months ago, I saw the change come over him and asked him what it was. He suddenly retired from business, sold out—or rather gave away his interest for next to nothing. He lost concern in everything and anything. He got haggard. I could see the mortal terror standing out in his eyes, day by day.

He'd gone to Tompkins again about some enormous venture he was contemplating. He was gambling more and more on these "inside tips," growing more reckless all the time. But this time there was a different answer, a catastrophic answer.

The thing under discussion was a long-term transaction, that would have taken about six months to pay off. "It doesn't matter one way or the other," Tompkins told him indifferently, "unless of course it's the firm itself you're thinking about, and not yourself personally." And then very indifferently, as though he'd known it all along; "Because you'll be dead by that time. Your life's coming to an end at midnight on the 14th-to-15th of next March."

I don't know whether Tompkins told it to him all at once, or doled it out piece-meal. I don't know how many times my uncle had to seek him out—pleaded with him maybe, or grovel on bended knees. I don't know anything at all. Uncle John wouldn't have been human if he hadn't asked the man how he would die, in what manner, and what could be done to prevent it.

"Nothing," was the merciless answer. "You can't stop it from happening. Though you fly to the far ends of the world, though you hide yourself in the depths of the earth, though you gather a thousand men about you to shield you, it will still find you out. It's there—written down for you—death by the jaws of a lion."

And then Uncle John started going slowly to pieces. Oh, it's not the money, Lieutenant McManus! It's not that he's endowed Tompkins with hundreds of thousands of dollars at a time, that he's dissipating my inheritance, trying to buy minutes and seconds of life back from a man who admits, himself, that he has no control over it and can do nothing about it. I don't mind that.

It's that he's dying by inches, before my eyes, day by day. It's that the Spanish Inquisition never devised tortures to compare to what he's going through now. It's that it's become communicated to me; I'm terrified and sick with horror. It's that the sun has gone out and we're trapped. It's that there's only tomorrow left now. I want help! I want help!

CHAPTER III

She was so overwrought that she fell forward across his desk, burying her face against it, pounding it helplessly with her clenched fist. McManus had to send out for a sedative. When she had drunk the spirits of ammonia, she lay down on a cot in another room and rested. McManus covered her up to the chin with his own overcoat, with his own hands.

When he went back again alone to his office, he spat out: "Gad, what things you run into. Twenty-million dollars, eighteen years old, and her very soul taken from her."

He sat down at his desk; stayed there staring blankly before him as though he'd forgotten the whole incident.

After about five minutes, he picked up the phone very slowly: "Send Tom Shane in here to me. And Schafer. And Sokolsky. And Dominguez. Send out a short-wave if you have to, I want 'em here right away. Tell 'em to drop whatever they're on, no matter what it is. . . ."

Tom Shane was just a pleasant-looking fellow in a thirty-dollar herringbone suit. He didn't look dumb and he didn't look bright either. Just a guy you wouldn't mind having a glass of beer with. He lined himself up to the left of the other three.

"Shane," said McManus, "are you afraid of lions?"

"I wouldn't go to bed with one," admitted Shane frankly.

"Shane," said McManus, "do you think you can keep a millionaire from being mangled by a lion at exactly twelve o'clock tomorrow midnight?"

It wasn't really a question. McManus seemed to be talking absent-mindedly while he did a lot of thinking behind the smoke-screen of words. "I may as well tell you now that the 'lion' might take almost any kind of a shape. It might be a bullet. It might be a poisoned cup of coffee. Then again it just might be an honest-to-goodness lion. I could fill that house with fellows like you, have 'em hanging from the chandeliers like mistletoe, but I don't want to do that. The 'lion' would only defer its visit, and come around some other time when it was least expected. I don't want that to happen; I want it to come when it's due to come, so I can make sure it'll never come again. So there's only one man going up there to that house with those two people, and I don't want him to fall down on the job. It's a double-header, too. If this is what I think it is, that girl's as doomed as her uncle. That would mop up the twenty-millions nicely, otherwise she could always bring suit to recover what's already been given away of it.

"So, Tom Shane, you go in there in the next room and sit by Ann Bridges, and go home with her when she's feeling fit enough. You're not a detective—you're her boy-friend on a week-end visit as her house-guest, or her new butler, or a traveling-salesman trying to sell her vacuum-cleaners, I don't care. But keep those two people alive. Midnight tomorrow's the deadline."

Tom Shane wheeled around and went out without a word. He still didn't look bright, but he didn't look dumb either. Just a well-built guy in a herringbone suit.

McManus said, "Schafer, you're on a girl named Elaine O'Brien—and all her family, too. I want to know more about 'em than they know about themselves. And be ready to pinch.

"Sokolsky, you're on a guy named Jeremiah Tompkins. And don't kid yourself by the way he looks that he's no great shakes of a guy. He's the kingpin in this, whatever it is. Don't let him out of your sight. Dictaphones and every trick of the trade. And try not to think while you're at it; the guy's supposed to be a mind-reader. Take somebody else on it with you, it's not going to be any pushover. And be even readier to pinch than Shafer. Tompkins has got to be

in custody long before midnight—whether you get anything on him or not.”

There was just a guy left that looked a little like Valentino, only better looking.

“Dominguez,” MaManus said, “I’ve gotta lotta little odd-jobs for you. But they’re just as important as the other guys’ assignments, don’t bluff yourself they’re not. Find out what zoos there are within a 500-mile radius of here. Check with every one of them and find out if they keep lions. Find out if any have escaped or been swiped.”

“Swipe a lion?” breathed the detective.

“Warn the keeper at all of ’em to keep extra watch over their lion cages tonight and all day tomorrow. Report to me. Got that? Then, find out at what night club Miss Ann Bridges had a slipper kicked across the dance floor two years ago. And what became of it. Also, the mate to it. Use your Latin looks, apply for a job there or something. Find out what waiter picked ’em up after she’d gone, and what he did with them. If you can get hold of him, bring him in. Report to me. Then, buttonhole one of the big shots at the National Security Bank, ask his cooperation, see if you can trace the leak by which the number of Miss Bridges’ safe-deposit box—1805—and what it had in it, came into the possession of a third party. There’s nothing criminal in that, in itself, but it would give us a swell lead.

“Y’got less than twenty-four hours to do all this! Y’ain’t eating and y’ain’t sleeping and y’ain’t even taking time off to talk from now on! Get going!”

When he was all by himself once more, McManus picked up the phone and asked for long distance. “Gimme Paris, France,” he said matter-of-factly, “the Chief of the Surete.”

Many blackmailing gigolos have had telephone love calls, but few have ever been the cause of a transatlantic long distance from police official to police official!

CHAPTER IV

The University Club Building has two entrances, one on the side street, the other on the avenue. An L-shaped lobby connects them. It’s just for men, of course—college men—and women aren’t allowed above the mezzanine floor, but the lobby’s usually full of them, calling for pinch-hitters to fill in at dances, theatre parties, and house parties.

Ann Bridges and Tom Shane arrived there simultaneously, she in her car at the main entrance, he in a taxi at the side entrance. He had a cowhide overnight bag with him and had changed in the cab itself. He had Princeton written all over him, and—no offense—was now veering dangerously toward the dumb side of the not-dumb, not-bright equation. He had a polo coat hanging down his back below the elbows, orange-and-black tie (very narrow diagonals, not loud), the usual thick brogues. If you'd unbuttoned his jacket, you would see a fraternity pin on the lower tab of his vest. He looked about twenty-three. He jelled perfectly.

The girl was just coming in one side of the lobby as Shane showed up from the other, bag in hand. They were collegiately informal—and loud. He didn't raise his hat; she punched him on the shoulder. "Hi, toots." " 'Lo ducky!" He grabbed her arm and they went sailing outside to her car, two young things without a care in the world.

Heads turned after them. Somebody mentioned her name. Everybody wondered who he was. All this to baffle watchful eyes that otherwise might have seen her drive away from Headquarters with Shane and would have known him to be a detective. A ticket for a traffic violation she had actually received two days previously was screen enough for her visit there tonight. McManus had had the desk sergeant enter a dummy complaint against her in his records, and a Headquarters reporter had fallen for it, phoned in a couple of lines about it to his paper.

In the car she took the wheel. Shane pitched his bag into the back seat, lay back on the base of his skull. But as they shot off, he suddenly grew up again.

"Feel well enough to drive?" he asked.

"It'll keep my mind busy till we get there. College men usually let the other fellow do their driving for them anyway. If you're not one to the life—! How did you do it so quickly?"

"Borrowed the outfit from a friend who really went to one—changed in the cab . . . Who's out there with him?" he asked abruptly.

"We have a cook, and a door-opener; then there's Elaine, and Uncle John's secretary. My uncle will be all right—I know what you're thinking—but he'll be all right until tomorrow night. He wants to live too badly to do anything to himself. It's tomorrow night we've got to worry about." She drew in her breath fearfully and repeated it a second time: "Tomorrow night."

"Step it up a little," Shane said quietly. "Ninety wont hurt any."

The clock on the dashboard said midnight. The midnight before the midnight.

It was a palatial place, lost in its own grounds. Couldn't see it from the main road, it was so far back, but a private driveway led to it. Lighted by its private road lights.

Two granite lions couchant, like a sort of omen, were the first things that met Shane's eye as he got out at the entrance. A little like the lions in front of the Public Library in New York, but smaller. They went up the steps between them.

"I bet it hasn't helped any to have those things staring him in the face every time he went in or out the last few weeks," Shane muttered grimly.

"He's spoken several times of having them removed and replaced by something else," the girl said, "but this terrible lethargy, this fatalism, that's come over him, has prevented his doing even that."

The butler let them in. Shane, taking a snapshot of the man through his mask of collegiate vacuity, decided this wasn't one of those crime-story butlers to be suspected at sight. He was an old man—sixty or more—had loyalty written all over him, and looked plenty worried.

"How is he, Weeks?" the girl asked in a whisper.

The butler shook his head. "I can't stand much more of it myself, Miss Ann. He's sat in one place ever since you left, staring at a clock on the wall." The old man looked sort of hopefully toward Shane; then, noting the get-up, his hopes seemed to fade a little.

"Yes, he knows about it, Weeks," the girl said. "That's why he's here. Take his bag up—put him in the room next to my uncle."

On each side of the long entrance hall a ceiling-high stained-glass panel was set into the blank wall, with electric lights hidden behind them to throw them into relief. They gleamed out in beautiful medieval tones of ruby, emerald, sapphire and mauve. Each leaded sub-division bore the head of some mythological or heraldic animal—a unicorn, a wild boar, a lion rampant, a pheonix. . . .

She saw Shane looking at the windows as they went by. "They came from England," she said dully. "Some royal abbey or other. Time of the Plantagenets."

Shane didn't know who the Plantagenets were. He wasn't supposed to, anyway. "Pretty old, I guess, eh?" he hazarded. It occurred to him that, judging by the number of decorative animals around, the prophecy might very well have originated right here in the house, in someone's evil, fertile mind.

"He ever been here, to your knowledge?" he asked.

"Who, Tompkins? Never."

She took the detective in to see the doomed John Bridges.

Bridges sat in the middle of a big room, and he had gathered three time-pieces around him. A big clock on the wall, a medium-sized one on the table before him, an expensive white-gold watch on his wrist. All three were ticking remorselessly away in the silence, like the mechanism of a time bomb. There was a minute's difference, Shane noted, between the wall and table clocks. Bridges turned two feverish eyes in hollow sockets toward them.

"Which is right?" he pleaded. "What does yours say?"

"It's twenty-nine past twelve, not half-past," the girl said.

His face lit up joyously. "Oh, Ann!" he cried. "Oh, Ann! that gives me a minute more! Just think, a minute more!"

Tom Shane thought, "For what he's done to this guy already, Tompkins deserves the chair, whether he intends to do anything more or not."

Aloud he said, cheerfully, "You and I, old timer, are going to have a good stiff highball together—then we're going up to bed!"

"Yes, yes," Bridges agreed pathetically. "My next-to-the-last night on earth! I must celebrate, I must—" His voice broke dismally. "Oh, help me forget for just five minutes! Just five minutes, that's all I ask!" He opened a drawer, pulled out a checkbook, scribbled hastily in it. "If you can take my mind off it for just five minutes, write your own figure in here over my name! Five thousand, ten thousand, I don't care!"

Shane thought: "I wonder how many times friend Tompkins has cashed in like this?" He went out to mix the highballs himself, and gave Bridges a shot of Scotch that would have lifted a horse off its shoes. McManus' words came back to him: "It may be a poisoned cup of coffee." He sampled the drink himself first, rinsing his mouth with it carefully. The taste was so good he hated to waste it, so he swallowed it. "Pleasant way of dying, anyway," he consoled himself.

He took the drink inside. "You go to bed," he told the girl. "Lock your door. It's my job from now on."

She said, "You're swell. Keep us alive," with a funny little catch in her voice as she sidled by him and went up the stairs.

The wall clock chimed one, with a horrid, shuddery, brazen sound. "Twenty-three hours to go," John Bridges said.

Shane clicked their glasses together with almost enough force to

shatter them. "Here's to crime!" he said huskily. He winked one eye deliberately at the doomed man.

CHAPTER V

3 A.M.—Shafer, lieutenant. Sorry to wake you up, but I've lost this Elaine O'Brien twist, Miss Bridges' maid—"

You've lost her? Well, find her again! Whaddye mean by—

It ain't that. I know where she is, but she's no good to us any more. She's dead.

Dead? What happened to her?

She did the Dutch. Took a run up to the bathroom just before I closed in on her, and swallowed something. I called an ambulance right away, but it was too late.

So then she was implicated. She knew something and was afraid we'd get it out of her!

She didn't know I was on her trail. I had just about located her house, when I heard the screaming start up inside. Time I busted in, it was all over. I'm holding the rest of them. They claim it was the prophecy preying on her mind. She came home tonight and told them she couldn't stand the gaff, waiting around out there for it to happen. I checked on the drugstores where she got the stuff, and she bought it a full three days ago, long before Miss Bridges came to us. What'll I do with the rest of 'em?

10 A.M.—Dominguez, lieutenant. I took a dish-washing job at the Club Cuckoo, where Miss Bridges lost her shoes. Say, my hands are red as lobsters!"

Never mind your hands, I'm no palm-reader. What'd you get?

They knew who she was, so they knew whose shoes they were. First the manager was going to send 'em out to her house next day—after all, they cost about fifty bucks a pair—but some kind of a foreigner sitting there at one of the tables buttonholes him. This guy gives the manager a lotta malarkey about how he's an old friend of Miss Bridges, knew her in Paris, and he'll see she gets 'em back. I got all this from a waiter, who I gave a tip on the horses to while I was massaging the crockery—

Well, you got something, Don. I was just asking about that very guy at the rate of twenty bucks a syllable. The shakedown racket

made Paris too hot for him so he came over here about two years ago. You gotta descriptch, I suppose?

Yeah. Misplaced eyebrow on his lip. When he's doing the hot spots he wears one eyeglass in his right lamp. Very good-looking. A short little devil, about five—

That's enough. One of his names is Raoul Berger, but he's got twenty others. So he got the shoes?

No. The pay-off is the manager wanted all the credit for himself and hung onto them. But this Frog didn't seem to mind—

Sure he didn't. All he cared about was knowing what had taken place, so he could tip off Tompkins and get under her skin. I'm sending out a general alarm for Berger right away. They're probably working hand-in-glove together, and intend splitting the Bridges millions between 'em at the windup. Probably the idea was originally Berger's, since he'd already shaken her down once in Europe.

Now, about the safe-deposit box, chief. I been conferring with Cullinan—he's the manager of that branch of the National Security—and we questioned the vault-keeper. I think I've cleared up pretty definitely about how the number of Miss B's box, 1805, was known—but not its contents. The vault custodian seems straight enough; he's been with them for years. He recalls definitely that one day about a year and a half ago, Miss B. took her box into one of the little private cubbyholes that are provided for that purpose down in the vault room. The custodian recalls it, because she came out and absent-mindedly left her key behind her. Now, two of these keys are used at a time, see. The custodian has one, and the owner of the box has the other. The number of the box it opens is engraved on the shaft of each key. Well, Miss B. stepped right back inside, that day she mislaid her key, and the custodian went with her to help her look. The key wasn't there. They came out again—she went through her purse and everything—no sign of it. He stepped in again a second time, and there it was, right on the slab! The custodian's pretty certain that the adjoining booth was occupied at the time, but he is hazy about who was in there. That doesn't matter. The partitions don't run all the way up to the ceiling. Obviously, it was our friend Berger, and obviously he'd been in there every time she was, waiting for just such a thing to happen. When it did, he probably used a fish hook or a magnet on the end of a string to draw the key up, memorize its number, then replace it again. All to add to Tompkin's build-up with her as a wizard. But about what

the contents of the box was, I don't know, unless he used some kind of a mirror as a periscope—

More likely she bought that necklace in Paris. Berger'd seen it on her over there, and he figured it would be in the box. Also the letters she'd written to him. Took a guess at it and scored a bull's-eye. To get into the vaults all he'd have to do was rent a box under a phony name for five, six bucks, stuff it with old newspapers, and keep showing up each time she did. Still, it isn't as easy as it sounds. Berger had to stay out of sight—she knew what he looked like—and he had to get in right next door to her each time, not further down the line.

For twenty million bucks I'd go to that much trouble myself.

Get busy on them zoos, or you won't even be earning forty-eight hundred.

Zoos! That's gratitude for ya!

5 P.M.—Sokolsky, lieutenant—

It's about time I was hearing from you! Where've you been all this time. What've you got?

A pretty bad case of the jitters, for one thing. And Dobbs—I took him on this detail with me—is about ready to crack wide open, I don't think he'll be any good for the rest of this case.

I ain't asking for a health report, I wanna know—

It's uncanny about that guy—Tompkins, I mean. He—he can see through walls and things—

Less words and more facts!

Yes sir. We took a room in the same house he lives in. We got a lucky break and got the one right over his. Tompkins was out at the time, so we fixed up a dictaphone and led it up through the ceiling behind the steam-pipe. The landlady don't like him, on accounta he read what was in her mind when she insured her third husband so heavily, after losing two in a year, and also 'cause he's hep that the color of the hair she goes around wearing ain't her own. She didn't tell me this; I put two and two together from the remarks she let drop. Anyway, I got around her and found some French cake-eaters been calling on Tompkins off and on for the past year or so.

Your voice makes sweet music! We're getting places fast now!

The landlady thinks this Frenchy is the nuts, but that's neither here nor there. The point is, he's the only person at all—outside of

the O'Brien girl and the old man Bridges himself—who has been near Tompkins since he's living in the house . . .

Well, the O'Brien girl's out of it now. I don't think she was in on it, anyway. Just a stooge they used to pump facts out of about the Bridges family. I think maybe she found out there was something phony up, after it was too late, and realizing what she'd done to her benefactors, committed the old harry. Go ahead, Sock, what else?

I gave Tompkins' room a good going-over while I was in there, and came across any number of checks made out by Bridges. Way up in the high brackets, too, telephone numbers! The only thing that don't jell right was some of 'em were dated six months or more back. He hauls 'em in all right, but don't seem to bother cashing 'em! Maybe he's just cagey, afraid to go too heavy yet while Bridges is still alive. Maybe he's saving them all up until B. and the girl have been done away with!

Will those checks build us a case against him and his French shill! What you do with them?

I was afraid he'd miss them if I impounded them this soon. Dobbs and I rushed a few of the biggest ones out, had 'em photostated, and then replaced 'em again.

Good work!

Tompkins came in about midnight, just as we were getting through, so we beat it upstairs to listen in. About two in the morning this French pal of his pays him a visit. Dobbs took down everything in shorthand, until he went haywire, and I'll read it to you.

Tompkins says, "You again? What do you want now?"

"Endorse me another one of them checks—I'm running short."

T. refused at first, says he don't want Bridges' money, and Frenchy has no right to it either. Frenchy pulls a gun on him or something, and makes him do it. Then Frenchy says, "Now you get hold of Bridges tomorrow and have him change his will, while there's still time. I'll supply the lawyer, a friend of mine. He's to turn over everything to you, see? Kid him that you'll call off the prophecy if he does it."

Tompkins says, "But I can't. It's not in my power. It's there. It's going to happen."

The French guy does a slow burn. "You think I believe that stuff? Save that for him! You do what I tell you, or—"

Tompkins answers quietly, "You're not going to get hold of his money, Berger. You're not going to live long enough to. Why, you're going to die even sooner than he is! His time is tomorrow night,

but yours is right tonight! You're never even going to get out of this house alive. There are two dicks in the room over us right now, listening to every word we say—their names are Sokolsky and Dobbs—"

The notes break off there, loot, because Dobbs keeled over right at the mike and pulled a dead faint on the floor. Yeah, honest! It gave me a pretty stiff jolt myself. Just seeing the leadwire of the dictaphone which I'm sure he didn't, wouldn't have given this Tompkins our names—nor how many of us were up there.

I'll have to quote the rest from memory: "Death," says Tompkins, "is rushing at you right now; I hear the beat of his swift wings. I feel it, I see it, it's on its way. You have only minutes left. And for me there is imprisonment waiting, and lingering death in a little stone room—"

I heard the Frenchman yell out, "So you framed me, you dirty double-crossing lug! Well, see if you saw this in your crystal ball!"

With that the gun goes off, and nearly busts my eardrum. The Frog has shot him.

I didn't wait to hear any more. I unlimbered my own gun and lit out and down the stairs hell-bent for leather. The Frog had beaten me out to the stairs; he was already a flight below.

I yelled, "Stay where you are!" Instead, he turned and fired at me, and I fired at the same time he did. He fell all the rest of the way down to the ground floor, and when I got to him he was dead.

Tompkins came out of his room unhurt, but with a powder burn across his forehead. The Frog must have fired at point-blank range, and still didn't hit him! He started coming down slowly to where I was, with nothing in his hands. Dobbs had come to, and came downstairs behind him, looking like he'd seen a ghost.

Well, this is the hardest part to believe. You can suspend me if you want to, but it's the God's honest truth. This man Tompkins came all the way down to where I was bending over the body at the foot of the stairs. I straightened up and covered him with my gun. It didn't faze him in the least. He kept moving right on past me toward the street door. Not quickly, either, but slowly as if he was just going out for a walk. He said, "It isn't my time yet. You can't do anything to me with that."

I said, "I can't, eh? You take one step away from me, and it'll not only be your time, but you'll be a minute late!"

Dobbs was practically useless; he almost seemed to be afraid of the guy.

Tompkins turned his back on me and took that one step more. I fired a warning shot over his head. He put his hand on the doorknob. So I lowered the gun and fired at the back of his knee, to bring him down. The bullet must have gone right through between his legs. I heard it hit wood along the door frame. Tompkins opened the door and stepped into the opening, and I got mad. I reared after him and fired pointblank at the back of his head. He wasn't five yards away from me. It was brutal—would have been murder and I'm willing to admit it myself, even though technically he was resisting arrest! I'm telling you, he didn't even stagger; it never even got him. He went on through and the darkness swallowed him up.

I leaned there against that door for a minute seeing ghosts, then I ran out after him. He was clean gone, not a sign of him up or down the block.

Loot, I'm in a frame of mind where I don't care what you do to me. My job is to get flesh-and-blood guys that know a bullet when they feel one, not protoplasms that don't even know enough to lie down when they're hit. . . .

Awright, Sokolsky, pull yourself together. Bring in the stiff and rinse yourself out with a jolt of rye; maybe it'll help you carry out instructions better next time! All I know is you let Tompkins slip right through your fingers, and we're right back where we were. We got to start all over again. We've stopped the crook, but the maniac or screwball or whatever you want to call him, the more dangerous of the two, is at large. And every minute he stays that way, Bridges and his niece are in danger of their lives! Tompkins wasn't bluffing when he walked out that door. He believes in that hooley himself; and if the prophecy don't work, he'll help it work! We've got seven hours to pick him up again, out of seven million people! Nice going, Sokolsky. Look in a mirror and get good and red in the face!

CHAPTER VI

"Don't!" Shane yelled at the man roughly. "Take your eyes off that clock! You're starting to get me, myself, doing that! I'm only human!" He took a quick step over to the table and turned the instrument face down.

John Bridges gave a skull-like grin, all teeth and no mirth. "You're only human—that's right. That's the truest thing you ever said, son. You're a detective, too, aren't you, son? That's why you've been hanging around here all day. Don't try to tell me, I know. This poor child here thinks you can save me. You think you can save me, too. You poor fools! Nothing can—nothing! He said I'm to die and I've got to die."

"He's lying through his teeth!" Shane yelled hotly. "That Tompkins is a faker and a crook and a skunk. He'll fry in hell before anything gets near you. I'll live to see it, and so will she—and so will you!"

Bridges' head fell forward, over his lap. "Will it hurt much?" he whined. "I guess it must. Those terrible fangs in their mouths! Those sharp, cruel claws, tearing your skin. But it won't be the claws—it's the jaws that will mangle me. By the jaws of a lion, he said—by the jaws of a lion!"

Ann Bridges put her hands over her ears. "Don't," she murmured quietly. She gave Shane a look. "I'm trying so hard to—to stay all in one piece."

Shane poured a dynamic drink, all Scotch with a needle of seltzer. He handed it to Bridges. "Give yourself a little Bravemaker," he suggested in an undertone.

The millionaire deliberately thrust the glass away from him. Liquor spilled all over the carpet; the glass bounded and rocked on its side without breaking. "Alcohol! Trying to ward off death with bottled slops!"

Shane took out his gun, pointed it butt-first at the old millionaire. "Don't this mean anything to you? Don't it mean anything to you that every window and door of this house is locked fast, that there's an electric alarm on them? That there's dozens of armed men within call, hidden all around this estate, ready to jump in and grab anyone or anything the minute it shows? That we're sealed up tight, just the five of us?"

The secretary had lit out in panic sometime during the previous night. Just as Elaine O'Brien had fled. Shane had found a note from him that morning, saying he couldn't stand it, resigning the job.

Bridges cackled horribly, like a chicken about to have its neck wrung. "Five against Fate. Five against the stars. And what a five! A slip of a girl, a loud-mouthed boy with a gun, and I—!"

"Fate, hell! Stars, hell!" Shane smashed the butt of his gun

fiercely at the face of the clock on the wall. Thick glass dribbled off it. "That for Fate, and that for the stars!"

Something happened to the clock. The damaged mechanism started whirring violently, the hands began to move—the hour-hand slowly, the minute-hand more rapidly. They telescoped, jammed together in a straight line pointing at the top of the dial, stayed that way. The whirring sound stopped, the apparatus went dead.

Bridges pointed a bloodless finger at the omen; he didn't have to say anything.

In the silence the old butler came to the door, stood looking in at them a minute. "Dinner is served," he said hollowly.

"The Last Supper," Bridges shuddered. He got up, swayed, tottered toward the dining room. "Eat, drink, let us be merry, for—tonight we die!"

Ann Bridges ran to the detective and clung to him. What difference did it make, at a time like this, that Shane was still a stranger to her, that she hadn't even known him twenty-four hours before?

"And I still say it was just a coincidence," he muttered pugnaciously. "You say it, too! Look at me and say it! It was just a coincidence. That happened to be the nearest place on the dial where they both met exactly, those two hands. My blows dented them. They got stuck there, just as the works died, that was all. Stay sane whatever you do. Say it over and over. It was just a coincidence!"

Outside the tall French windows, in the velvety night sky, the stars in all their glory twinkled derisively.

10:45 P.M.—Dominguez, Mac. I've been trying to get through to you for fifteen minutes. Must be some trouble along the line somewhere. I'm way the hell out at a little crossroads called Sterling Junction—yeah, it's only about ten miles from the Bridges place, in the other direction. Very bad grief. Checking the zoos like you told me, I dig up a traveling road show—a carnival or whatever you want to call it—making a one-night stand here.

Now they had two lions—yes, I said had, that's the grief. Two monsters, a male and a female, both in one cage. My check-up was a post-mortem. They'd both busted out not twenty minutes before—don't know if the cage was left open through the keeper's carelessness, or deliberately tampered with. I beat it right up here to find out what I could. The female was shot dead just outside the carnival grounds but the male got away clean. A posse is out after it with everything

from shotguns to fire extinguishers, hoping to rub it out before it gets anyone. . . . They think it's heading toward the Bridges estate. Someone in a Ford reported sighting what he mistook to be an enormous tawny dog with green eyes in the underbrush as he went by.

Earlier in the evening, the keeper tells me, there was a peculiar-looking duck mooning around the lion cage. Kept staring at them like he was trying to hypnotize the two brutes. The keeper caught this guy teasing them with a bit of goods torn from a woman's dress, flitting it at them through the bars. He sent him about his business without having sense enough to try and find out what the idea was. It may have been our friend Tompkins, then again it may not. Plenty of village half-wits can't resist riling caged animals like that.

D'you suppose brutes like that can be mesmerized or hypnotized in some way, loot? D'you suppose they can be given the scent of one particular person, through a bit of clothing, like bloodhounds? Yeah, I know him, but then this whole affair is so screwy from first to last, nothing would surprise me any more. You better contact Shane right away and let him know he's up against the real thing, not a metaphor any more. There's a lot of difference between a man-eater like that and a little runt like Tompkins, when it comes to a showdown!

CHAPTER VII

John Bridges was slumped in a big overstuffed chair by now, staring wild-eyed at nothing. Shane was perched on the chair arm, his gun resting on his thigh, finger around the trigger, safety off. Ann Bridges was standing behind the chair, leaning over it, pressing soothing hands to her uncle's forehead.

The portieres were drawn across the French windows, veiling the stars outside—which were there nevertheless. In addition, a ponderous bookcase blocked one window, a massive desk the other. The double-doors were locked on the inside, and the key to them was in Shane's vest pocket. The butler and the Finnish cook were, at their own request, locked in the scullery.

It was the awful silence that was hardest to bear. They couldn't get the old millionaire to say anything. Their own voices—Shane's and Ann's—were a mockery in their ears, so they quit trying to

talk after a while. Bridges wouldn't drink either, and even if he had, he was past all sensation now; it wouldn't have affected him.

The girl's face was the color of talcum. Her uncle's was a death mask, bone structure overlaid by parchment. Shane's was granite, with a glistening line of sweat just below his hair line. He'd never forget this night, no matter what else happened for the rest of his life. They were all getting scars on their souls, the sort of scars people got in the Dark Ages, when they believed in devils and black magic.

The travesty of food and drink that Shane had swallowed at that shadowy supper table a while before was sticking in his craw. How can wine warm you when the toast is death at midnight? He'd tried to urge the girl to leave while there was time, to get out and leave the two of them to face it alone. He hadn't been surprised at her staunch refusal; he admired her all the more for it. He would nevertheless have overridden her by physical force if necessary—the atmosphere had grown so deadly—but for one fact.

When he'd tried to contact McManus, to have a special bodyguard sent out to take Ann away, the phone was dead. The house was cut off. Ann couldn't go alone, of course; that would have been worse than staying.

They had one clock with them in the room again. Bridges had begged and pleaded so hard for one, that Shane reversed his edict. The mental agony of Bridges, and the strain on Ann and himself were much worse without a clock than with one. It was better to know just how much time was left. Shane had got a large one with a pendulum, from the entrance hall. It said fourteen minutes to twelve.

Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick—and it was thirteen minutes to twelve. The pendulum, like a harried gold planet, kept flashing back and forth behind the glass pane that cased it. Ann manipulated her two solacing hands over the doomed man's temples.

"It goes so fast, so fast," John Bridges groaned, eyes on the clock. The minute hand, shaped like a gold spearhead, had notched forward again—eleven to twelve.

"Damn!" Shane said with a throaty growl, "Damn!" He began to switch the muzzle of his gun restlessly up and down on his thigh. Something to shoot at, he thought; gimme something to shoot at! A drop of sweat ran vertically down his forehead as far as the bridge of his nose, then off into one of the tear ducts beside it.

Tick, tick, tick—whish, whish, whish—ten to twelve.

Bridges said suddenly, without taking eyes off the clock: "Son—

Shane, or whatever your name is—call Warren 2424 in the city for me. Ask him once more—oh, I've asked him so many times—for the last time, if there isn't any hope for me? Ask him if I've got to go, if he still sees it?"

Shane said, "Who?" But he knew. Bridges wasn't aware yet that Tompkins would be in custody, that McManus had seen to that item right after Ann's visit.

"Tompkins," the ill man answered, "I haven't—haven't heard from him in two days. And if there isn't any hope, say goodbye for me."

Shane said curiously, sparring for time because he knew the phone was dead, "You want me to unlock those doors, go out there into the other room where the phone is?"

"Yes, yes," Bridges said. "It's still safe, we have—yes, there's ten minutes yet. You can be back in here in a minute. His landlady will answer. Tell her to hurry and bring him down to the phone—"

Shane snapped his fingers. "Maybe I can bring this baby back to life," he thought. He gave the girl a look. "Stay right by him, Miss Ann. I'll just be outside the door."

He took the doorkey from his pocket, opened the two tall doors, and stepped quickly to the phone in the room beyond. The lights were on all over the house, and everything was quiet.

The phone was still dead, of course. He spoke loudly into the silent mouthpiece, "Give me Warren 2424, hurry it up!" He feigned a pause, then, "Bring Jeremiah Tompkins to the phone, quickly! This call is from John Bridges."

He faked another wait, slightly longer. The clock in the next room ticked remorselessly away before Ann Bridges and her uncle. He held his gun in his right hand. The phone was a hand-set. A gust of wind or something scuffed and snuffed at one of the French windows over on the other side of the house; instantly his weapon pointed in that direction. The sound was almost animal-like. Phoo! like that. A snuffle.

It wasn't repeated. Shane remembered his charade, and said, "Tompkins? Hello! I'm talking on behalf of Mr. Bridges. Does that still hold good, for tonight at twelve? It's nearly that now, you know."

There was a long mirror-panel in the wall over him. In it he could see the room he had left. The girl and her uncle were bending forward, drinking in every word.

"Fight fire with fire," he thought. "I don't know why McManus didn't sweat Tompkins down to the bone, then make him eat his

prophecy to Bridges' face. That would have undone the damage quicker than anything else!"

He raised his voice. "That's more like it!" he said. "When did you find this out? Re-checked, eh? You should have let him know first thing—he's been worried sick! I'll tell him right away!" He hung up, wondering just how good an actor he was going to be.

He went briskly in again, gave them the bridgework. He could tell by the girl's face that she saw through the bluff; maybe she had found out already that the phone was n.g. But if he could only sell the death-candidate himself—

"It's all off!" he announced cheerfully. "Tompkins just told me so himself. There's been a change in—in, uh, the stars. He's not getting the death-vibrations any more. Can't possibly be midnight tonight. He'll tell you all about it himself when he—" Something in the old man's face stopped him. "What's the matter, what're you looking at me like that for? Didn't you hear what I just said?"

John Bridges' head was thrown back, mouth open. He began to roll it slowly from side to side. "Don't mock me," he said. "Death's too serious to be mocked like that. I just remembered—after I sent you out there—his landlady had that phone taken out a month ago. Too much trouble calling roomers to it all the time, she said. There is no phone at all now in the house where Tompkins lives."

Shane took it like a man. He turned away without a word, closed the doors again behind him, leaned his back against them. Tossing the key up and down in the hollow of his hand, he smiled mirthlessly out of the corner of his mouth.

The figure in the chair was holding out a hand toward him, a trembling hand. "It's five-to," he quavered. "I'm going to say goodbye now. Thank you for sticking by me, anyway, son. Ann, my dear, come around in front of me. Kiss me goodbye."

Shane said in a hoarse, offensive voice: "What'll you have for breakfast?" He ignored the outstretched hand.

Bridges didn't answer. The girl crouched down before him and he kissed her on the forehead. "Goodbye, dear. Try to be happy. Try to forget—whatever horror you're about to witness in this room in the next few minutes."

Shane said belligerently, trying to rally him: "Not to want to die is one thing. Not to lift a finger to keep from dying is another! Were you always like this, all your life?"

The doomed man said, "It's easy to be brave with forty years ahead of you. Not so easy with only four minutes—"

The tick of the clock, the hiss of its pendulum, seemed louder than all their voice. Three minutes to twelve . . . two minutes. John Bridges' eyes were like tiny billiardballs in his head, so rounded, so hard, so white. Shane's trigger-finger kept twitching nervously, aching to pull, but in which direction, he didn't know.

One minute to go. The space between the two clock hands was a sliver of white, a paring, a thread. Three pairs of eyes were on it. Dying calf-eyes; frightened woman's eyes; skeptical policeman's eyes!

Then, the space was gone. The two hands had blended into one.

A bell, a pair of them, rang out jarringly. The phone that Shane had thought dead, that had been dead until now, was pealing on the other side of the door. The shock lifted him off his heels. The girl jumped too. Bridges alone gave no sign.

Bong! the clock struck mellowly, majestically repeatedly.

Before the first vibration had died away Shane was already outside at the signaling instrument, gun-hand watchfully fanning the empty air around him. A trick? A trap to draw him away? He'd thought of that. But Bridges and the girl were in full sight of him; to get to them anything would have to pass him first. And he had to answer this weird call.

McManus' distant voice said: "Hello! Shane—Shane? Line was down, couldn't get through to you till now. Been trying for an hour. . . . Everything's under control, Shane. We've beaten the rap, the guy's saved! No time to tell you now. I'll be out there the quickest I can—"

Bong! cut across the voice, third stroke of the hour.

"Hurry, chief," said Shane. "The poor guy is sweating his very life away with terror. I want you to tell him it's all O.K."

"General alarm was out for Tompkins. At half-past ten tonight he walks in here of his own accord, gives himself up! Yeah, Headquarters! Said he knew he'd be arrested anyway. He's still spouting Bridges has to die. Also that he's going to conk out himself, in jail waiting for his trial to come up. The latter he has my best wishes on. Here's something for you, kid, after what you must have gone through out there tonight; according to Tompkins, you're marrying twenty million bucks inside a year. Yeah, Ann Bridges, before the year is out!"

Bong!

"Oh, one thing, I just got word they shot a lion that was heading

your way, cornered it on the outskirts of the estate. A real one that broke out of its cage earlier tonight. We thought at first Tompkins had something to do with it, but he's been able to prove he wasn't anywhere near there when it happened. Just a spooky coincidence. Tell Bridges everything's jake. I'll be there myself in three-quarters of an hour—"

The girl's frenzied scream seared through Shane like cauterization. He dropped the phone like a bar of red-hot iron, whirled. Old man Bridges dashed by before he could stop him and sprinted down the entrance-hall like something bereft of its senses.

"Stop him! He's out of his mind!" Ann Bridges screamed.

Bong!

Shane took up the chase. Bridges had vanished but the chatter of broken glass sounded far away. The detective turned into the hallway—and slid to a stop. Walking warily, apprehensively, he approached the distant figure of the millionaire. Bridges stood at the far end of the hall, leaning against the wall, which held two stained-glass panels.

As Shane approached, the other man's knees buckled wearily but he didn't fall. A chill swept through Shane's flesh. He stopped, unable to breath. For John Bridges was headless or seemed to be. His head had been thrust directly through one of those leaded panes, rammed straight out the other side.

Jagged teeth of thick, splintered glass which held his neck in a vise had pierced his jugular. You could see a dark shadow running down the inside of the lighted pane that was the millionaire's life-blood.

It was midnight and the square of glass he had chosen in his blind, headlong flight, out of all the many squares, was that one of the lion rampant!

Bong!

The mane and eyes and feline nostrils of the beast still showed above John Bridges' gashed throat, as though the painted image were swallowing the man bodily. And for fangs, instead of painted ones there were jagged spears of glass, thrusting into Bridges' flesh from all sides of the orifice he himself had created.

Death by the jaws of a lion!

Bong! the clock struck for the twelfth time, and then all was silence.

McManus raised worried eyes above the report he was making out.

"What'll I put in here? Would you call it murder by mental suggestion?"

"I'm not so sure," Shane answered.

"Are you starting to go superstitious on me, too?" the lieutenant snapped. But his eyes went uneasily toward the window, beyond which the stars were paling into dawn.

They both looked long at those distant inscrutable pin-points of brilliance that no man can defy or alter.

Almost everyone has experienced some weird or unbelievable adventure. Fantasy Fiction magazine wants to publish the best of such stories and will pay \$5.00 for each letter it prints.

The Figure in the Desert

While prospecting for uranium out west, I lost myself in an immense waste of desert. The nearest settlement was miles away. No sign gave hope of direction. After hours of stumbling along through unbearable heat, I saw a dust devil, one of those dancing corkscrews of dust that prance along country roads. It was spinning off to one side. As I watched, it advanced toward me and then spun away, straight toward a blue mountain that showed above the horizon.

I stopped, hypnotized by its action. Its thin base whirled like a skater's feet and its top flung out a sandy plume that was like an arm pointing. I turned toward it and it died down. Without thought, I veered back to my old uncertain course, and it rose up again, spinning close and then whirling off toward that blue mountain. Without reason, I followed it again. All afternoon and into the moonlight night, I followed that sand devil. About midnight, I was close enough to the blue mountain to see a campfire. It was another prospector who gave me water and made me welcome.

I suppose the sand devil was nothing more than air currents and desert dust but I can't forget the "life" in it as it pointed my course. It brought me out and saved my life. I'm still prospecting, but I don't call them dust devils any more. I call them dust angels.

Eugene Mallony, General Delivery, Butte, Mont.

Treasure Accursed!

By Otis Adelbert Kline

AS usual, my best customer in San Antonio waited until fifteen minutes before train time, then affixed his name to the dotted line. As he had done a dozen times before, he apologized for keeping me so long, expressed the hope that I would not miss my train.

I reached the depot in time to buy a railroad ticket, but the Pullman frames for the Cotton Boll Flyer had already been taken aboard. The redcap deposited my luggage in the observation car, pocketed his tip, and rushed for the door as the train started.

At this late hour I fully counted on occupying a "shelf," and was therefore agreeably surprised when the Pullman conductor informed me that I might have lower twelve in the Golconda.

I made out my reports, figured my commissions, and wrapped myself around a table d'hote dinner, then settled down in my compartment to read a novel I had purchased that day.

When I get interested in a story I am deaf to all that passes about me, so time and the Cotton Boll Flyer sped unheeded until I was aroused by the voice of the porter:

"Yas, suh. Make up yo' berth, suh?"

Reluctantly I arose and carried my book to the tiny smoking compartment. The solitary occupant greeted me with a nod and a "Howdy," as I entered. Evidently he wanted to start a conversation. I returned his greeting and sat down to resume my story, hoping that he would go to bed, or at least keep silent. He did—keep silent, I mean—for about three minutes. Then he opened up.

"Must be a mighty interestin' book you're readin'."

"Yes. It's a good story."

"Story books is all right, but stranger things than ever was written sometimes happen in real life."

Apparently I was in for it. This man had a story to get off his chest, and I felt that I might as well listen to it and have it over with.

There was nothing about the man himself that might arouse interest. He was of medium build, gray-haired and plainly attired, evidently a small-town merchant of the Southwest.

"I have heard that truth is sometimes stranger than fiction," I replied, hoping he would be brief.

"You're shoutin'!" he exclaimed. "You're good and well shoutin',

and nobody knows it better than I do. I come down here from Wardmore to rest my shattered nerves—doctor said I should get out in the open for a few weeks.

"I was in the open one day and one night, and if my nerves was shattered before they're teetotally wrecked now. Open, hell! No more open for me."

He produced a flask of colorless liquid from his hip pocket and proffered a drink, which I declined with thanks.

"This ain't no moonshine stuff," he explained. "Genuine mescal from over the border. Needn't be afraid of it."

"No, thanks, I never indulge."

"Well, I just gotta take a bracer now and then. Can't eat, can't sleep, can't do nothin' for thinkin' about last Monday night."

He took a deep draft, made a wry face, shuddered, and replaced the flask in his pocket.

"You must have had a harrowing experience," I ventured.

"Harrowin'? You said it. How old would you take me to be?"

"I should say about fifty-five."

"I'm just turned forty. Last Monday my hair was as black as yours. It turned gray overnight, and all because I followed the doctor's instructions, acceptin' an invitation from my friend, Dave Bonner, to go for a deer hunt on his ranch.

"Well, the day before I got there Dave tried to ride a no-good bronc, and the result was one busted collar bone, to say nothin' of sundry and assorted bruises, scratches and cuts.

"Dave was laid up, but he insisted that I go on the hunt anyhow, with one of his men named Joe Stark; so we rides out from the ranch bright and early Monday mornin' with Joe's hound rangin' ahead and a loaded pack horse trailin' behind.

"A thirty-five-mile ride took us well into the deer country, an' Joe picked on a shaded hollow as an ideal spot for the camp. It was a sort of gulch, runnin' plumb down to the river bed.

"I say river bed because there was about seventy-five feet of sand bottom stretched between the banks, with ten or fifteen feet of river zigzaggin' down the center of it. Of course when there's rains it's different, but it's been pretty dry down in this country lately.

"Well, anyhow, we pitched camp there, figgerin' to mosey over to a salt lick Joe knew about early the followin' mornin' and do a little still huntin'. After supper, Joe suggests that we while away the evenin' with a bottle of mescal and a little game of draw.

"About ten thirty the bottle is empty and Joe has most of my

loose change, so I propose that we turn in. We're headin' for the tent when—zip! Joe's old hound which has been rangin' around among the trees, shoots between us with his back bristlin' an' his tail between his legs, an' ducks through the flap.

"Joe was some surprised. Said he never seen the dog act thataway before. Said he'd hunted everything from jack rabbits to mountain lions and never see him show a streak of yellow.

"We tried to coax him out of the tent, but nothin' doin'. He just crouches down in the corner and shivers, so Joe picks up his rifle and walks off in the direction he come from, to find out what it was that scared the daylight out of him.

"He comes back a few minutes later an' says that whatever it was, it must have sneaked off in the dark.

"No sooner does he get the words out of his mouth than we hear the horses snortin', squealin', and stampedin'. Before we can get to them they're gone, picket pins, ropes, an' all.

"I opine that if they go back to the ranch we're in a hell of a fix, but Joe calc'lates they won't go far with their ropes draggin'.

"We go back to the tent and I step inside while Joe stirs up the fire. I hear him talkin' to some one outside, so I step out figgerin' we got company.

"When I come up behind him he jumps kinda quick and swings his gun on me, then looks sheepish and asks how in blazes I got behind him so quick when I was standin' across the fire from him just a second before.

"When I tell him I was in the tent while he was talkin' across the fire he's some mystified hombre. I'd've concluded he was tryin' to kid me if he hadn't been so serious about it.

"I sit down by the fire and try to cipher the thing out, and turn to Joe with the opinion that maybe he's had just a drop too much of mescal, when he sticks his head out of the tent and wants to know who in Halifax I'm talkin' to.

"For a minute I think I'm seein' double, for there is Joe standin' in the tent, and here is Joe beside me. Then I only see him comin' out of the tent. After considerable discussion we agree that the mescal must be causin' double-sightednesss, an' turn in.

"I get about five minutes' sleep. Then I wake up sudden and hear Joe say: 'What's that?' There's a peculiar sound on the outside of the tent, as if some one was scratchin' it with a curry comb, or maybe rippin' it with a knife.

"The hound is so scared he is afraid to growl, although he rumbles

a little bit, deep down in his throat. We grab our guns and rush outside, but find nothing and the noise stops.

"Then we go inside and it starts up again, so I stay inside and Joe goes out, and the noise stops once more. We decide the only thing to do is to stand two-hour shifts, Joe takin' the first shift while I turn in, too nervous to sleep."

"After about a half hour I'm just dozin' off when I hear a stifled groan from Joe. I rush outside and find him wrasslin' around as if somebody had a hold of him around the waist. Funny part of it is that I can't see the party that's got hold of him."

Here the narrator stopped for a long pull at the pocket flask, while I tensely awaited his next words. My book was completely forgotten.

"Well, Joe breaks loose from whatever has hold of him, but I can tell he's just about all in. I can see him shiverin' from where I stand, and his eyes rollin' somethin' awful. Truth of the matter is, I was doin' plenty of shakin' on my own account.

"I tried to brace up and tell Joe we was just plain piped, and havin' delirious tremblin', and kinda had him thinkin' my way when the dog gave a howl and rushed out of the tent. He passed me hell-bent-for-Sunday, and ain't never been seen since so far as I know, but I'm tellin' you that hound was plumb loco.

"Joe seen the way he was bristlin' and frothin' at the mouth, and, of course, that queered my theory about bein' bewildered by cactus juice, for, as Joe remarked, the dog didn't drink no mescal.

II.

"WELL, of course, this occurrence didn't buck up my courage none, and I was for leavin' the place flat, but Joe was one of them hombres that has a streak of bulldog courage in him. You know the kind that never know when they're licked. That's Joe.

"Then we hear the scrapin' sounds inside the tent. We go in, and the sound continues outside. We step out, and the sound goes on inside.

"Once more I opine that we better vacate the premises while vacatin' is humanly possible, but Joe is plumb obstinate. He says he's goin' to stick around if it's only to see what the hell will happen next.

"Let the son of a sand-dab scratch if it wants to," he says. "It ain't hurtin' us none."

"Then he piles some wood on the fire and lights his pipe casual like.

Not wishin' to be outdone I loads up my donicker likewise, and we squat down by the fire while the scratchin' goes merrily on.

"Did ja ever get used to sleepin' with a clock tickin' by your bed and have it wake you up when it stopped? I was just gettin' sort of used to this scrapin' sound the same way and startin' to doze off when it stopped. I was wide awake in a flash and so was Joe, for I seen him give a sort of start on the other side of the fire.

"What got me, though, was the looks of the fire itself. There was plenty of wood on it, but it seemed to be slowly dyin' down—like somethin' was suckin' the flames into the ground. I stirred it up and Joe put on more wood, but nothin' would start it up.

"Down, down, lower and lower it went, from flames to embers, from embers to ashes. It got so dark I could barely see Joe sittin' across from me.

"Then those invisible arms grabbed me and I had a fight on my hands. I could hear Joe gruntin' and threshin' around on the ground, but I couldn't see him and was too busy myself to help him.

"What happened after that seems like a nightmare. I dimly remember breakin' loose and tryin' to find Joe, but failin' in this and pullin' my freight pronto.

"I never was what you would call an A-number-one sprinter, but take it from me, partner, I cut the breeze some that night—cut it clean and handsome until my wind give out. Then I went down in a heap.

"Next thing I knew after that I was layin' sprawled up against a cactus with the sun shinin' in my eyes. Not derivin' any great amount of comfort either from the sun or cactus, I got up and looked around with about as much idea of where I was as a Piute wanderin' in the Catacombs.

"Only thing for me to do was to follow my own trail, which I did, marvelin' meanwhile at the big stretch of territory between steps. If I could broadjump like that regular I could make one of these here Olympian athletes look like a one-legged sand-flea competin' with a kangaroo.

"Well, I moseyed along, inhalin' alkali dust and hopin' it wasn't more'n a hundred miles to water, when I sights our horses with ropes trailin'. Them cayuses was glad to see me, too, but I was a danged sight gladder to see them.

"When I got into camp I seen Joe squattin' unconcerned by the fire cookin' breakfast. When he seen me he give one startled whoop and dropped a panful of bacon into the fire.

" 'Well,' I asks, 'do I look anyways peculiar this mornin', or have you still got mescalitis?'"

" 'Lordamighty!' he shouts, 'your hair—look at your hair.'"

"He passes me the camp mirror and I seen it like you see it now, changed from black to white overnight. I'm some surprised myself, but there ain't nothin' to do about it, and I figger I'm in for a kiddin' bee up at the ranch, so I try to take it casual."

" 'That's what comes of ridin' in the sunshine without a hat,' I says. 'Plum faded all the color out of it.'"

"He mumbles somethin' about not knowin' that I was addicted to hairdyes, and asks me to rustle some firewood while he slices more bacon. I'm pullin' an old, dried limb from under some piled up leaves and sand when I see something that sends the cold shivers up and down my spine. A whitened human skull is grinnin' up at me from under the limb."

"I calls Joe and we scratch around some more, uncoverin' a whole skeleton and likewise a small metal box. The lid is fastened with an iron padlock that's so rusted it crumbles when Joe taps it with the butt of his six-shooter."

The story-teller paused for another nip from the bottle.

"You can shoot me for a coyote if that box wasn't full of gold nuggets with a slip of yellow paper restin' on the top. There was some writin' on the paper which was almost plumb faded away, but we managed to figger it out. It said:

" 'With my dying breath I curse the man who removes this box or its contents from this spot. Thomas Quinn.'"

"I was for puttin' the box back and leavin' the neighborhood pronto, but Joe gives me the laugh. Don't believe in no dead men's curses or bunk like that. Says we'll go back to the ranch after breakfast and split fifty-fifty, which I finally agrees to do."

"We was ridin' ranchward a half hour later, followin' the river bank, along which is some pretty high bluffs. Joe was all excited, plannin' what he'd buy with his half of the treasure, when all of a sudden his horse went loco and dashed straight for the edge of the bluff."

"Joe tried to stop him, but it wasn't no earthly use. Might as well have tried to stop a rampagin' long-horn with a cobweb. It was a good hundred and fifty foot drop, and when I heard the thud at the bottom I knew that horse and rider was both in the happy huntin' ground."

"When I got down to the river-bed I found Joe layin' there stone

dead, half under the carcass of the horse. The treasure box was layin' a few feet away with nuggets scattered on the sand.

"Did I pick it up? Say, partner, you couldn't have hired me to touch that box or one of them nuggets for all the gold in the United States Mint.

"Well, there wasn't nothin' to do but go to the ranch and bring the boys, which I did. When we got back we found Joe and the horse layin' there, but the box and nuggets was gone.

"We saw the square mark where it had hit the sand, and beside it the track of big hob-nailed boots—the kind prospectors wear. There wasn't no tracks leadin' up to it, only a trail startin' where the box had lit and endin' in the water."

III.

At this moment the porter appeared in the doorway.

"Yo' berth is ready any time now, suh," he said.

He walked over to my companion, who, I was surprised to observe, betwixt fallen asleep, and shook him.

son "Come along now, Mistah Reed. Yo' don't want to sleep in the It y nokah. Come on an' I'll help yo' into yo' berth."

2 After the erstwhile story teller had departed, muttering a sleepy s "Good-night," the Pullman conductor came in.

"Hear the treasure story to-night?" he inquired, grinning.

"You must have been listening in," I replied.

"Listening in? Hardly. I've heard it too often for that. Had this run now for fifteen years, and Old Man Reed has told that story to some one on the train every Saturday night since I've been on. Most of the drummers that come down this way regularly know it by heart.

"Old man's a good sort. Lives up in Wardmore and buys cotton down this way for a firm in Dallas. Comes down every Monday morning and goes back Saturday night.

"He's as straight as a string, and tends strictly to business all week, but as sure as Saturday rolls around he gets illuminated for the home-ward trip, and the story has to come out.

"Sometimes when he can't scare up an audience, I accommodate him by listening. I don't believe he could make the trip without telling it to some one. Thought I would have to get on the job to-night, but you happened in just at the right time."

Oh well. I've always heard that a first-class salesman is bound to be a good listener.

THE END

The Voice in the Foxhole

(Continued from inside front cover)

I toppled over asleep on my feet until my rifle banged my shins. The woods were all quiet except for some big stuff up north and a flutter of small arms near the village. But something dark lay against the snow at the edge of the trees. It seemed to be moving. I fired at the blackest part of the patch and it didn't move any more. While I was wondering if my imagination was cutting up, I nodded off again. Keeping my eyes open had got to be agony. Somehow, I recognized my danger and found a cigarette. Pulling my coat over the top of the foxhole, I lighted the cig and twisted ^{it} between the base of the second and third fingers on my ^{right} ^{hand} the way truck drivers do. Then I grabbed the flimsy photograph of my kid and looked at it hard . . . hard. . . .

That's the last I knew.

When I woke up, someone was screaming in my ear. It was the sergeant, because this voice belonged to a woman I had heard it before, but never like this. Never so saturated with gold. Never so desperate. When I recognized it, it was my wife's voice. She was screaming my name, saying, "Wally, you're hurting Tom. You're hurting Tom."

My mind lurched out of its sleep and, without moving, I looked out over the snow. Time had passed, I knew. Now things were different. Then I saw them. A squad of German infantrymen were almost on top of my position. They had crossed the clearing toward my foxhole and were huddled together, evidently planning their next move. I could hear every word they said. My sleep was finished now. I got two grenades and pulled their pins, hurling them at the Jerries. Their explosions were the sweetest music I ever heard. One Jerry came for me with his bayonet. I stopped him with two shots.

My sergeant bellied up five minutes later with my relief. I picked up my things and stumbled back to a ravine where the boys had a fire. One of them asked questions until he saw my left hand. It was still holding the picture of my kid. The bottom of the photo had burned off but the baby's figure was there, complete and unharmed except for one black-rimmed hole where his left hand had been. I felt a burning in the palm of my hand where the cigarette

butt had. The raw wound ran between the second and third fingers and onto the fat hand-meat. I guess I had been holding the soap when I dropped off and it fell against the fire in the butt and burned through. Then I probably shifted and it caught on fire again at the bottom. I was still too sleepy to puzzle it out or to figure how my wife's voice got into that foxhole.

At a week later, Patton and the fly boys got us out of there alive. About three months later, I got a letter from home. The paragraph that interested me most said:

"I had a horrible dream the other night. I dreamed that you were standing over Tom, seeing him for the first time, when you collapsed and fell on top of him. I couldn't get you up. Tom began to scream and cry and still you wouldn't get up. In my dream I got hysterical and yelled at you, 'Wally, you're hurting Tom.' When I woke, Tom was standing in his crib and yelling bloody murder. I guess that's what roused me. He was all right after a while except that next morning I found a raw swelling between the second and third fingers of his left hand. I guess some 'Congo' bit him in the night. The dream was terrible, darling. It *ynoka* real. I shall never forget how hard I yelled at you. Tom and I pray for you each night. Keep safe and come back to us soon."

Well, there it is. After I got that letter the war turned hot and I was too busy to do much thinking. Now that I look back—well; that's what happened in the year of 1944 and if someone else were to tell me this I'd say he was nuts. I still don't know what to make of it. It happened, I swear. In a court, they would ask for proof. What is my proof? Well, I was alone and my only witnesses were those Jerries who died sort of sudden. I lost my burned photo of Tom that same night and never saw it again.

But I've got Tom. He's a big kid now. And there's a funny little scar-burn that still shows between the second and third fingers of his left hand. My wife wonders how it got there.

It sure beats the hell out of me.

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